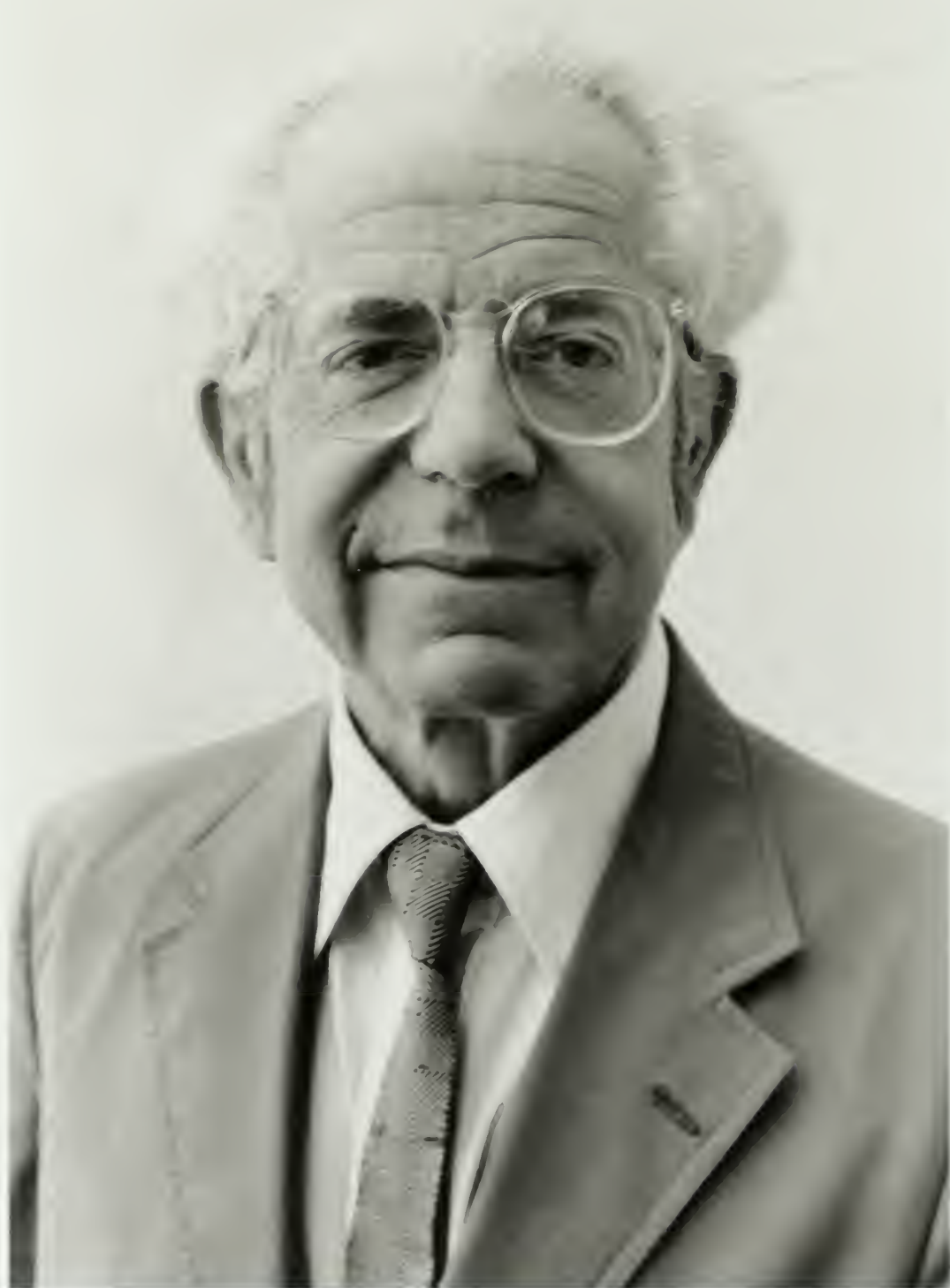




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SPIRIT AND PROJECT

Eduard F. Sekler

Interviewed by Richard Cándida Smith

Art History Oral Documentation Project

Compiled under the auspices
of the
Getty Center for the History of
Art and the Humanities

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Frontispiece: Eduard F. Sekler, 1991. Photograph by Jane Reed of the Harvard University News Office, courtesy of Eduard F. Sekler.

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Richard Cándida Smith, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Michigan, interviewed Eduard F. Sekler at his office in Gund Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. A total of 8.75 hours were recorded. The transcript was edited by Katherine P. Smith.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Eduard Franz Sekler
Dipl. Ing., Ph.D., A.M. (hon.),
Dr. Tech. h. c.

Osgood Hooker Professor of Visual Art, Emeritus
Professor of Architecture, Emeritus
Honorary Associate of Eliot House

Eduard Franz Sekler, architect and historian of architecture, became Visiting Professor of Architecture at Harvard University in 1955 at the invitation of Dean Josep Lluís Sert. In 1960 he was promoted to Professor of Architecture. In 1962 he was appointed Coordinator of Studies at the newly founded Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts and in 1966 he became the Center's first Director, in which capacity he served through 1976. He was also the first Chairman of the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies (1968–1970) and Acting Chairman in 1972/73. In 1970 he was appointed the first Osgood Hooker Professor of Visual Art. He taught lecture courses at both Harvard College and the Graduate School of Design ranging from "Introduction to Design in the the Visual Arts" and "Design in the Visual Environment" to "Architecture and Urban Design in Antiquity; in the Middle Ages, and in the 19th and 20th Centuries." Seminars he taught included "Problems of Theory and Criticism in 20th-century Architecture" and "The Shaping and Preservation of Urban Spaces."

Born on September 30, 1920, in Vienna, he was educated at the Schottengymnasium secondary school there. He continued his studies at the Faculty of Architecture of the Vienna Technical University where he graduated with distinction in 1945. Having been awarded a British Council Fellowship, he went on to study in London at the School of Planning and Regional Research, and, under Rudolf Wittkower, at the Warburg Institute of London University. He received a Ph.D. degree in 1948 from the latter.

Before coming to the United States as a Fulbright Fellow in 1953, Professor Sekler taught for seven years at the Vienna Technical University, and holds the title of Professor Extraordinarius from that institute. He also acted as a correspondent for the Austrian technical periodical *Der Aufbau*, and in connection with his research and professional commitments during those years he traveled to Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and Yugoslavia. From

1948–1959 he was a member of C.I.A.M. (International Congress of Modern Architecture) and from 1951–1954 he served as expert member on the UNESCO International Committee on Historical Monuments, Artistic, Historical and Archaeological Sites. He is now a UNESCO Consultant and a founding member of ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites).

From 1964–65 Professor Sekler was on the Board of Directors of the Boston Architectural Center, from 1969–75 on the Board of Directors of Architectural Heritage, Inc. (Boston), and from 1971–74 on the Visiting Committee of the School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. From 1975–85 he was a member of the Cambridge Arts Council, and from 1979–80 he served on the Commission on the Future of Washington University, St. Louis. In 1990 he became chairman of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, Inc.

His professional work includes a number of public housing schemes and private houses as well as a telephone exchange in Vienna, several exhibitions on historic urban spaces, an urban renewal project, "Alt Erberg," in Vienna, and the design (with partners) of the Austrian Cultural Institute in New York. He also restored a war-damaged church on the Leopoldsberg near Vienna and remodeled parts of historic Wartenstein Castle in Lower Austria. In 1974 Professor Sekler served as architectural consultant to the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Laxenburg, Austria. He planned, researched, and directed a number of exhibitions at the Carpenter Center, among them "Bauhaus, a Teaching Idea" (1967), "Approaches to Color" (1968), "Historic Buildings of the Boston Region" (1971), "Light and Structure in Gothic Design" (1972), "Anonymous Art from Market and Bazaar" (1975), "Artifacts from Nepal" (1977), "Patan Darbār Square, Urban Conservation in Nepal" (1983), and "Hermann Heller 1866–1949" (1990).

After 1970 Professor Sekler's opinion was increasingly sought in matters of historic conservation. On several occasions between 1971 and 1991 he acted as consultant to the historic Monuments Office, Vienna; for example, in connection with the preservation of the Wittgenstein House, Otto Wagner's Postal Savings Bank, and Josef Hoffmann's Sanatorium Purkersdorf.

When Professor Sekler was sent by UNESCO to Nepal in 1972 to advise on the preservation of historic monuments and monument zones, there began a lasting professional involvement which has taken him ten times to that country. He headed the international team that prepared the "Master Plan for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of the Kathmandu Valley," and drew up the detailed plan of action for the UNESCO "International Campaign to Safeguard the Kathmandu Valley." He

also prepared a detailed urbanistic conservation study for Patan Darbār Square. In 1978 and 1984 he was sent by UNESCO to advise the Government of Thailand on the "Masterplan for Sukothai Historical Park" and on the inventory of monuments in the park. In 1984 he also participated in the ICOMOS Paris meeting of experts to discuss criteria for the inclusion of historic cities on the World Heritage List, and in 1986 he took part in the ICOMOS conference of experts in Toledo called to discuss the preparation of the Charter for Historic Cities. Since 1989 he has been an advisor on historic conservation to the Getty Foundation, Santa Monica, California.

Professor Sekler is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a Member of the Austrian Chamber of Registered Architects, a Life Member of the Architectural Association, London, and an Honorary Corresponding Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute of London. In 1963–66 and 1970–73 he served on the Board of Directors, Society of Architectural Historians. In 1970 he was awarded the Cross of Honor for Science and Art of the Austrian Republic. In 1983 he received the Prize of the City of Vienna for Humanities and Social Sciences. In 1986 he was appointed Fellow of US/ICOMOS. In 1988 he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Technical Sciences by the ETH (Federal Institute of Technology) Zurich, in 1989 Institute Honors by the American Institute of Architects, and in 1990 the Jean Tschumi Prize by the International Union of Architects (UIA). He held Guggenheim Fellowships in 1961/62 and 1963, and also received grants from, among others, the American Council of Learned Societies and the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. In 1991 he was the recipient of a Hoopes Prize of Harvard College, and in 1994 he was awarded the Precht Medal from the Vienna Technical University.

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Abbreviations:

GSD = Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

CCVA = Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

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SESSION ONE: 25 FEBRUARY, 1994

[Tape I, Side One]

SMITH: We're going to be tracing some of your intellectual roots, and we usually start with where and when you were born.

SEKLER: I was born in Vienna in 1920.

SMITH: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents [Eduard and Elisabeth Sekler]?

SEKLER: Yes. In fact, at the last moment I was looking for some relevant material and I found this newspaper cutting from 1967 that I had saved. This is my father [shows clipping]. They interviewed various elder gentlemen in Austrian culture: [Franz Theodor] Csokor; [Clemens] Holzmeister; [Albert Paris] Gütersloh, who was a painter and poet; and among the actors there was my father. He was at that time the oldest still-active actor in the German-speaking world, having been for fifty years with the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna; that's what's written up here in this article.

SMITH: What kind of theater did he specialize in?

SEKLER: Oh, he had quite a varied career, of which I of course only consciously experienced the latter part, because his career began in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy before the First World War. In fact, I did what you are doing now. During his last years in Vienna I got him occasionally to tell me

about his youth and I recorded his memories on tapes. As a young actor he had gone out into the provinces, into the small German-speaking theaters in the monarchy, and sometimes they played, really, on boards that were put on top of barrels, with no electric lights. He always used to say that he felt sorry for the young actors of a later age who didn't get this chance to get real experience, because you had to play a different part every night. You had to learn very quickly and you had to be very versatile. For years my father was stage director, and in the end he played small character parts. So I certainly grew up with a strong awareness of the theater, though both my parents always told me, "You may become whatever you like, only don't go into the theater!" [laughter]

SMITH: Was your mother involved with the stage as well?

SEKLER: That's how my parents met each other, but my mother left the stage when the first child was born, which was a sister who died before I was born. I haven't seen these things for a long time and I just found this portrait. [shows photo] It was their diamond wedding anniversary, so here he was, eighty-eight years old, and he had been on the stage for seventy of those years. They both died at a very ripe old age.

SMITH: I presume he was involved with classical theater.

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: Was he also involved with contemporary drama?

SEKLER: His heroes were people like [August] Strindberg and [Henrik] Ibsen.

That was revolutionary theater when he was young. He had worked under a director who pioneered those plays in Vienna. There were scandals in the theater, my father told me. [Josef] Jarno, this director, would get up in the box where he was watching and shout: "Respect for the author!"

SMITH: One of the questions we've been asking people is about the role of culture in the family household, and of course in yours it played a big role.

SEKLER: There was something there, yes. On a Sunday morning, for example, when my father was free, he would go with me to the museum, whichever one it was. Also, we loved to go for walks in the old city, in the inner city of Vienna.

SMITH: Where did you live?

SEKLER: Well, not in the first district, but a little further out, in the ninth district. My father also loved old books. I remember that we would go together, without my really understanding much about it, to secondhand book shops that were extremely inexpensive, down in a basement somewhere. There he would be looking for things, and maybe he would find something for me, Indian stories or Karl May. At the very earliest stage it might be some history book where my activity consisted in then coloring the illustrations. [laughter]

SMITH: Vienna is a city that's surrounded by myth, particularly the Vienna before 1914, but also the Vienna of the interwar period. Were you aware,

particularly in the thirties, as you became an adolescent, of the intellectual and cultural richness of the city?

SEKLER: I doubt it, frankly. I was ten years old in 1930. I more or less took for granted what I saw and what happened. It's true, there was this mythical aura in Vienna. Once there had been the monarchy here—the emperor and the empress—and my mother was called Elisabeth. She was born on December 24, which was also the birthday of the murdered Empress Elisabeth. It had been a custom in the monarchy that girls who were born the same day as the empress got a gold ducat and were christened Elisabeth. So a portrait of the late Empress Elisabeth was hanging in our apartment, but there was no portrait of the Emperor Franz Josef. Certainly there was this feeling that something impressive was happening in Vienna, and to a little boy, you know, to walk around in the Hofburg was impressive, and slightly mysterious.

SMITH: Were your parents involved in intellectual circles?

SEKLER: It was chiefly the theater, though they had one architect friend. Of course I didn't know all their friends, but they would take me along into the coffee house, the Café Central, where I could look at the illustrated comics, or I would crawl around under the table, and they were having their coffee, hotly debating. [laughter] But I think they were mostly theater people. Theater was very important in Vienna, you know. Many people read first the theater page

and afterwards the other stuff.

SMITH: Did your parents know Karl Kraus?

SEKLER: I think so. I had an uncle who was a great admirer of Karl Kraus. That's why I knew the name, but I didn't know what it meant. My uncle had all the issues of *Die Fackel*, the original issues, in his library. It is to my great grief that after he died, his widow, without telling me anything—at that time I was already at Harvard—sold all his books to some book dealer for a trifle. I would have loved to buy some of them, including *Die Fackel*.

SMITH: Would they have known the Schoenbergs or Alban Berg?

SEKLER: I don't know. I know that my father knew [Oskar] Kokoschka. He had various stories about Kokoschka, and about [Adolf] Loos, but these people would also come into the coffee houses. One of the wives of Loos was an actress, and she explained to my father why she had left him. She said, "The man was impossible. He would come in the kitchen and try with his finger to see whether the dishes and pots were clean." [laughter] So it looked different when I was there, from what it looks like now, when I look back with a historic view and knowledge of the cultural contributions these people made. Then, I was with them as human beings, with their odd qualities and all the anecdotes that went with them. My father knew [Hugo von] Hofmannsthal, for example, and Richard Strauss. In fact I have an autograph of Richard Strauss. As a little boy it was *de*

rigueur that you had an autograph book, and my parents would say, "Go over there to that gentleman and ask him for an autograph." It's odd that I remember very vividly what Richard Strauss looked like. It must have been a few years before his death that he gave me his autograph.

SMITH: Was your family religious?

SEKLER: Not really, no. My mother would go to church occasionally.

SMITH: So it was not a big part of your life?

SEKLER: No.

SMITH: When did you start developing an interest in architecture?

SEKLER: There must have been a little stimulation from this one architecture friend of the family, who was Ernst Lichtblau. He was a pupil of Otto Wagner—this I only found out later. There's going to be a Lichtblau symposium at the Rhode Island School of Design later this term and they've asked me whether I would speak there. Lichtblau was one of three brothers, and they lived out in the thirteenth district, in Ober St. Veit. He was the first architect I consciously saw in my life—maybe I was ten or twelve years of age at that time—because he had designed the villa for that uncle I mentioned who had that library. He himself had his studio across the road from there. At that time this was border country, and I remember it would always be a big excursion from where we lived. On certain Sundays, we would go and visit Uncle Karl, and it

took about an hour to get there, by streetcar and elevated, and finally we had to walk, and that's why a number of artists lived out there—also poets. You may have heard of [Hermann] Bahr. He was the big antagonist of Kraus. Kraus never missed an opportunity to write something against Bahr.

One summer, Ernst Lichtblau took up a little conversation with me. I was playing in the street outside because it was a cul-de-sac, so it was quite safe, and there was the Lichtblau house. He started to talk to me—what was I doing and so on—and he must have taken a liking to me. He called me into the garden and he played with me a little, you know, like Indians or trappers. I can't remember the details, but of course I was very happy. It turned out that his brother also knew my Uncle Karl very well, and my parents became great friends with them. We would go out often, but more to the brother than to Ernst. The brother lived on the same plot but in another house. On one occasion, Ernst let us come into his studio. It was a little building, and for a little boy there were these fantastic things there—little house models, ceramic models. He was working on some design and there were very colorful things around, like curtains or furniture fabrics he had designed and so on. So I was very impressed. I must have felt it would be great fun to do this sort of thing.

Later, this must have been in '32, we went to the opening of an exhibition where he had a building. The exhibition pavilion was very elegant; I didn't

realize this at that time, only later when I studied it from the literature. This opening was a great event in the architectural history of Vienna; it was the so-called Werkbundsiedlung (like the Werkbundsiedlung outside Stuttgart), where a number of the avant-garde of the time had their houses, and Lichtblau also had one. The president of the republic was there; I remember that because he was pointed out to me. Otherwise, I just remember walking around and looking at these very unfamiliar buildings. They were all flat-roofed, and we went in and saw how they were furnished.

I can't in honesty say that that was the moment when I decided to become an architect. Not so at all, because I developed a very romantic love for sailing and boats—this happens to teenagers you know. You can go sailing in Vienna. There is a branch of the Danube with still water where there are sail boats. So I became a Sea Scout. I think it was the only Austrian Sea Scout group that existed. [laughter] It all sounds really quite crazy, but that's what it was. I ended up wanting to be a naval architect. Fortunately, if you wanted to be a naval architect at that time, the Vienna Technical University still had an institute of naval architecture which survived from the time of the monarchy when there had been an Austrian navy. In addition to completing what you would call high school here, the *Gymnasium*, another condition for being admitted there was one year of practice in some shipyard or boat yard. So I found a boat yard in Vienna

that took me as a volunteer. There was an extremely nice chief engineer there, named Modes, who eventually talked me out of becoming a naval architect. He also loved sailing, and he said, "In you I see myself as a young man. You have to realize you don't have a future in Austria." In Austria there were few places where you could get a job: one was the big yard on the Danube that built the Danube ships, and still does, another was the boat yard somewhere on one of the lakes. Now there are one or two more boat yards. This engineer said, "To be a big designer, to be somebody, you would have to go to Germany, or somewhere on the sea, but it's very much confined to a few families; they are the great boat designers. If you love sailing, see that you end up having a boat, but you should choose another career." So after I had spent a year there at the boatyard, I went to the Vienna Technical University, and when I saw the exhibits in the architecture department I thought, "This looks really much nicer." So I ended up with architecture.

SMITH: What kind of *Gymnasium* had you gone to? Was it a *Realgymnasium*?

SEKLER: No, it was a humanistic *Gymnasium*, Schottengymnasium, in Vienna. Looking through these pictures, I discovered this. [shows photo] You see, this was the Schottengymnasium. The name, Schotten, means the Scots, which is really an erroneous understanding of medieval Latin, because it referred to the Irish monks who had come as the missionaries to Germany and Austria. They

were Benedictines who had their first station in Regensburg, and then they came to Salzburg. Eventually they came to Vienna and I think in the twelfth century they founded that abbey there, the Schottenstift, which still exists today.

I was lucky I was accepted there, because it was very difficult to get in; it was considered a very good school. That and the Theresianum were considered the best schools in Vienna, though in retrospect I know that the Akademische and the Wasa Gymnasien also were first-rate. We were something like sixty pupils at the beginning, and only some thirty ended up doing the *Matura*. It was a very strict school.

SMITH: So you were in both Greek and Latin?

SEKLER: Six years of Latin, four years of Greek. [laughs] It was a strict school, no doubt about it.

SMITH: Was it run by priests?

SEKLER: Yes, but not only priests. At that time already there were not enough priests to teach everything, so we had also regular teachers. Also, these were very liberal priests; it was fantastic—no bigotry whatsoever.

SMITH: Did you learn any modern languages?

SEKLER: Yes, I learned English from this gentleman, Father Willibald, who had spent time in England. He looked like a medieval monk with his short-cropped hair, and he spoke English perfectly. During the war he spent time in an

English abbey, and then he was in the States. There was another one, not such an ideal figure, from whom I learned some French. But most of the French I then learned in an evening course from a very good teacher, and eventually Italian also—that was already at the university.

But the Schottengymnasium certainly was a very important influence, because they, consciously or not, were more interested in forming character than in just conveying information. One piece of evidence that it was a special place is that recently we had our fifty-fifth reunion of the people who graduated from there. In those fifty-five years we've always remained in touch, and if possible we get together at least once a year. Most of these people, if they were not killed prematurely, have done something significant. As opposed to people who really hate to think back to their high school or *Gymnasium* days, we love to think back on it. Of course at that time we didn't realize how happy we were.

SMITH: When you were a teenager, Austria was convulsed by a lot of problems, and of course you were eighteen when the *Anschluss* occurred.

SEKLER: Correct. It was the last year that one could get a *Matura* here. Then the Schottengymnasium was closed. It was closed because it was a thorn in the flesh of Nazism. The director was a wonderful character, Vincenz Blaha. He was saved by the parents of two pupils who happened to be illegal Nazis. He was already arrested by the gestapo, and these two parents—which was also

typical—went to get him out, because he didn't mince his words. After the *Anschluss*, too, and before, I mean about the Nazis being illegal he would say, "With people who throw bombs, you can't make politics."

It is a strange phenomenon that there were both illegal Nazis and Jewish boys there, who had to emigrate, but in the class there was no hatred or anything that I remember. After the war, a memorable moment was in 1945, when Vienna was very much a ruin. A few of us came back for the Easter procession. There was a procession on Easter Sunday and it used to always go out from the church and into the courtyard. This time it went out from the church and out into the open area in front of the church. You could see the ruins all the way down to the cathedral and further, and there were again these former pupils. I remember one of them—he later became the president of one of the law courts—saying to me, "Ach, bist auch du wieder da?" which means roughly, Oh, so you are here again, too? You see, in a way, it was as if nothing had happened. And those of us who survived have remained friends ever since.

SMITH: Did you also have to serve in the military?

SEKLER: Yes, for two years. But I had volunteered for the Austrian army because Austria had compulsory military service, two years at that time. If you volunteered and you had a *Matura*, which meant you were an intellectual, then you were permitted to do one year only. So of course, everybody from our class

volunteered. You also had the advantage that you could choose what you wanted to do. By coincidence, during a bicycle trip with a friend I was given advice by people who were in the army. We stopped at some barracks, because they would give you food there if you came around lunchtime. We were boy scouts and the soldiers were about our age, a little older, and I remember one said, "Don't be crazy. Don't go into the infantry; be a wireless operator, that's a good job. So again, a romantic naval connection: I saw myself doing the Morse code on board a ship or something. I learned to be a radio operator, and I was doing that for two years. I can still vaguely remember the de-de-de-dit-dit-dit.

SMITH: But this was before the *Anschluss*.

SEKLER: Then came the *Anschluss* and much against our will we found ourselves in the German army. But again I was lucky because this company of wireless people were hard-boiled Viennese toughs, most of them. I learned things there I would never have learned anywhere else. Some of them took pity on me because I was of course completely from another world. However, they respected the fact that I knew a lot of things they didn't know. So they took me under their wing and helped me in many ways. From the German point of view this company was so bad that they had to recall a Prussian lieutenant who was in charge of it and replace him with an Austrian reserve officer, an old type who had served in the First World War, who knew how to talk to these people. They

had exercised such passive resistance, you know, that it drove this Prussian lieutenant up the wall.

SMITH: It sounds like *The Good Soldier Schweik*.

SEKLER: It was that policy, yes. I was at the funeral for one of them who died recently. When it was finally the point where he would have to go I guess to Poland or to Russia, he lost a finger, in an accident. His hand got into the blade of the ventilator of the engine, and so for the rest of the war he was in Vienna at the barracks taking care of engines or something. They were that kind of people. They had no use for the Germans and no use for the war.

SMITH: It sounds like the people that you knew both in the *Gymnasium* and in the army were opposed to the German occupation.

SEKLER: Not all. As I told you, there were some illegal Nazis in the *Gymnasium*. And there were a few, especially one, who everybody was making fun of, a great idiot, who also was an intellectual. He was the only one who volunteered to become an officer. We all thought he was the greatest idiot. He was a Nazi. That's why I don't buy any of the generalizations. If you were inside, you knew of course that there were Nazis, miserable Nazis. I don't buy this idea that all Austria was innocent. No, I have heard them scream, "Sieg heil!" But there were others, too. That engineer in the shipyard eventually lost his life in Mauthausen, because it turned out that in that boat yard there was a

cell of the resistance movement, and one swine gave it away, so he was arrested with somebody else and he didn't survive it. What happened to the other person, I don't know. I ended up also in the resistance movement eventually, with a friend, and we were lucky to survive it.

SMITH: What kinds of things were you doing?

SEKLER: Well, this was in the last years of the war, and the question was, How to save Vienna? How to make sure it would be an open city and would be handed over. Our task was to get information and pass it on to people who had their contacts. The commander of the local army unit, Major Karl Biedermann, wanted to save Vienna. He collaborated with the resistance. Again, it was given away by one swine who survived it and afterwards was an editor of an illustrated periodical. Biedermann was hanged and the whole thing blew up, and we were warned. After that, Sepp Stein, who was my friend, and I didn't sleep at home anymore. We kept moving around because they were now arresting people in the street. Any young man would be interrogated: Why aren't you fighting? or Why aren't you building the last defenses against the Russians?

SMITH: Why weren't you fighting? I mean, didn't they have a compulsory draft?

SEKLER: Well, there was the advantage that I had been permitted to study at the Technik, because naval architecture was considered important for the war.

Once I was in there, it was only a question of internal rearrangements, and the only tricky moment was when I had to go and have my book where all the courses were entered stamped by the representative of the Nazi student organization. But again, there were always people in there who quietly would help, saying, "Give me the book. I'll submit it." You know, some woman maybe in the office there. So the Nazi would never see me.

SMITH: Was there pressure on you and other students to join the Nazi party?

SEKLER: It worked differently. The pressure was, What are you doing for the war effort? To be in the Nazi party was considered a privilege. Things are very intricate in real life. One of my teachers was Karl Holey, who was the surveyor of the cathedral of Vienna, and his son had been in the Schottengymnasium with me. His son died indirectly because of the war; he got tuberculosis or something like that. Old Holey really extended protective wings over my friend and me.

He made us members of an organization he had which was called Baueinsatztab für die kirchlichen und kulturellen Gebäude. This was an organization which the Nazis had approved; it was a historic monuments first-aid organization. When the bombs hit an historic building, it was a question of going there to see what could be done as first aid quickly, like putting tar felt over a roof, or propping something up, helping with putting sandbags in the Cathedral of St. Stephen's to protect things there and at the same time also recording as much as possible,

being helpful in many ways. This was considered essential for the war effort—the protection of historic monuments.

It was a small group, and they were of course all very Catholic, and very anti-Nazi. Unfortunately, the one job we had started we couldn't finish. We were making measured drawings of the medieval roof construction of the cathedral, which was incredible. It was a five-story construction. St. Stephen's had a very steep roof with oak beams and uprights of gigantic dimensions. We began this work and we couldn't finish it. Of course, as everybody knows, in the last days of the war the cathedral was hit, the roof burned, and parts of it fell through the vaults and ignited the choir stalls underneath it, despite sandbags and so on, and that was one of the most serious losses of works of art.

That was the beginning, in a way, of my involvement with historic buildings. I learned very directly from Holey what you have to do and how you do it. Then I became assistant to the chair of architectural history at the Technical University, where part of the institute's teaching was *Denkmalpflege*, the care of historic monuments. In fact, my first job as a young architect was restoring a church on the hill that overlooks Vienna, on the Leopoldsberg. It came through connections because my parents knew the rector of that church. I had been in touch with him as a child, without knowing what all this was about, and later he was very happy to have somebody who could help him with the

restoration of his church. This church had been hit by a bomb, half of the facade was gone, and one of the vaults had fallen in. So I began, and of course I always consulted with my teachers and the historic monuments people about what I was doing. I managed to finish that job, and the church is standing there today.

SMITH: Did you reconstruct the church as it had been? How did you approach that job of reconstruction?

SEKLER: Well, I found out that the last story of the towers—it's a two-towered facade added to a centralized building—had only been put on in the middle of the nineteenth century, and it didn't really fit at all. It was done economically—those two little turrets were too small for what was underneath them. Then I found old drawings and engravings, as well as the masonry that actually remained in the building. I found the actual top, and how wide it had been. So I reconstructed that on the basis of those measurements and the engravings and so on. That's what you see today. Today it looks more like what it looked like before 1850, but otherwise everything was reconstructed exactly the way it was.

SMITH: Wouldn't another option be to modernize the parts that were replaced, to put in *concret brut*, or something like that?

SEKLER: Yes, but the idea didn't occur to me that one would do that.

SMITH: I've seen things like that.

SEKLER: I know, yes, I have seen them too. But this has been such a landmark

in Vienna. You know, it's a favorite outing for foreign visitors. It's the last hill that drops off to the Danube, and from there you have the most beautiful view of the city. It's also the place from where the armies descended and relieved Vienna from the Turks in the famous siege of 1683. The mass before the decisive battle was read in that little church up there. It's a very historic place—you don't fool around with that!

SMITH: Could you tell me a little bit about your architectural training? What kind of approaches did your teachers give you?

SEKLER: The truth is that most of the teachers were rather reactionary except for one teacher, [Siegfried] Theiss, who built what is still known in Vienna as the *Hochhaus*, in the Herrengasse, which wouldn't look like a skyscraper to us today, but it was a gesture of the modern movement in the old city. You see, the modern movement in Vienna only had a small following. Austrian architecture in a way was always something rather specific, a little out of the mainstream.

[Tape I, Side Two]

SMITH: You were saying that many teachers were suspicious of the modern movement.

SEKLER: Also, there were some really convinced Nazis among them, there is no doubt about it: the man who taught urbanism; the man who taught interiors and garden design; and [Karl] Ginhart, the man who taught art history, though he

was a very good teacher and a reasonably good art historian. Others, like Holey, or Alfred Keller, who was really a survivor from the monarchy and knew the world better, were not of that coloration, but they had to be careful. I would say frankly that the training we got was not what people would get, say, twenty years later at the Technical University. I had to learn a lot later, to re-educate myself, which came when I left Vienna and could see what was going on in the rest of the world.

But we did get very sound training in technical matters—how you put a building together. We also learned things like geology and mineralogy, so that we knew the building stones well enough, and traditional methods of construction. Also, the urbanistic training wasn't too bad either, in spite of the sad fact that that man was such a Nazi. He taught what has become extremely fashionable in this country now. You know those seaside developments in Florida designed by [Andres] Duany and [Elizabeth] Plater-Zyberk. It takes up the ideas of Camillo Sitte and Raymond Unwin, the builder of the British garden cities. Well, we were taught that stuff at the Technical University. That's why I'm not so impressed that people rediscover it now. I mean, I was glad that I forgot it. [laughter] We learned some useful things, there's no doubt about it. But it left me with a feeling there was more to architecture than what I had learned.

SMITH: Was your training more or less equivalent to the beaux-arts tradition?

SEKLER: No, it was something really special—a very special mixture of its own. The modern movement was represented by Theiss, who in spite of his Nazi leanings was a good architect and an excellent teacher. I think he held no brief for a Nazi type of architecture; what he built was good modern movement architecture.

SMITH: Was Otto Wagner respected, or Adolf Loos?

SEKLER: Yes, but they were remote. It isn't so that we were told a great deal about Otto Wagner and Loos—and Josef Hoffmann, not at all. Very strange in retrospect, but that was a fact.

SMITH: Who would be the architects that were held up to you as the models to follow?

SEKLER: [Paul] Bonatz, [Peter] Behrens, and some other German architects—the names escape me right now. Also, again, there were people who have been rediscovered: [Sigurd] Lewerentz and Gunnar Asplund—Scandinavians who adopted a sort of mild neoclassicism which then passed over into the modern movement. There was [O. R.] Salvisberg in Switzerland. So our heroes indeed at that time were Scandinavia and Switzerland—that's where the good architecture was. As soon as I could, I went to a summer school in Sweden and went around to look at Swedish housing.

SMITH: This was after the war?

SEKLER: After the war, yes, because housing was the big problem after the war, and it was known that in Switzerland and in Sweden they were doing good housing. Of course Asplund and Salvisberg and Lewerentz were very good architects. They are being rediscovered now, which is again amusing to me.

SMITH: You have mentioned Max Theuer as one of your teachers.

SEKLER: Yes, oh yes. He was also a kind of father figure, like Holey, because he was a humanist, and we understood each other in this respect. He was by that time quite aged. He died fairly soon after the war, and he helped me in many ways. He taught me the ways of the academic world and pointed out important literature. I remember he once caught me taking Gottfried Semper's *Kleine Schriften* from the library. I was very eager to read, you know. He said, "Ah, that's very good, but if you read that you also have to read Alois Riegl." So that's how I found out about Riegl.

I really learned about classical architecture there—in a true sense, not in a pastiche sense. In fact, my job was to correct student projects that involved drawing classical orders and palace facades, how you rendered them and how you draw the shades and shadows—echoes of the beaux arts. But there was no idea that you would ever design like that; it was only considered a good thing to know as a rendering technique and to learn about proportions and the world of

forms—*Formenlehre*, the doctrine of forms.

Theuer was teaching the architecture of antiquity, from Egypt through Rome. To my great shock and fright, one day Theuer handed me this little sheaf of his lecture notes and said, "You know, I can't do it on Thursday. Would you go and give the lecture?" So there I was, thrown into the water. [laughter] I guess I did it. At that time you had to draw on the blackboard. Slides were only used maybe twice in a term, and those were black-and-white slides. Otherwise, you were drawing the facade of the Parthenon on the blackboard. You have these little notes and there you are at the blackboard. It has to be to scale, not a sketch. Nobody would do that anymore today, but it taught me a few things.

SMITH: I wonder if the students don't actually get more about the building by looking at drawings than at the photograph.

SEKLER: Yes, and they were drawing it; they were following the drawing, so of course because they drew it, they remembered it.

SMITH: What happened to Josef Frank? Did he stay in Vienna?

SEKLER: Josef Frank went to Sweden. He had a tremendous impact on Swedish design. The fact that Swedish interior design was so good was due in part to Josef Frank, who had come there. He had had the firm in Vienna, Haus und Garten, where they had the most lovely fabrics which he had designed, and very elegant objects and furniture. He went to Sweden before the *Anschluss*. I

think also he knew a Swedish woman, and he joined this firm, Svenska Ten, and they sold all this stuff, which became one of the roots of good Swedish interior design. I went to see him when I went to Sweden for this summer school. It was a pilgrimage to hear what he could tell me about the Vienna of the thirties. In a rather memorable way, he said, "It was very simple. There were two hundred architects and ten commissions." It was terrible in the thirties, really awful.

SMITH: Everywhere, I guess.

SEKLER: Yes, and that explains some of the intriguing that went on and why things got politicized and so on. Fundamentally it was just to get the commission and to get rid of the other guy.

SMITH: During the Nazi period, was [Albert] Speer held up as the ideal architect?

SEKLER: Actually, not that I remember, so much. I mean, who would have held him up? Not Theiss, not Keller. Ilz, who was the Nazi, didn't have a chance because he was teaching urbanism. He would have praised it, I assume, but certainly not Holey and not Theuer. Also, at that time people thought of Speer more as the man who was doing the war production; he was in charge of that. One good thing that we were taught was the landscaping of the Autobahn. I forget who did that, but I gather from our landscape architects that it's still

considered a good job.

SMITH: Was there a Nazi culture? This is a question we have been asking different people.

SEKLER: Well, there was the *Gauleiter* of Vienna, Baldur von Schirach.

Baldur von Schirach had tremendous cultural ambitions. He was trying to rope in cultural figures so he would sort of spawn a cultural revival. Yes, definitely there was an ideal. But in cultural life, you know, there was resistance. There were the famous *Morgenfeiern* in the Theater in der Josefstadt, organized by director Hilbert, where they read poetry and parts out of plays, with music in between. The selection was always extremely clever, and those who wanted to understand understood exactly. In the Burgtheater performances there was Raoul Aslan, a wonderful actor who everybody knew was anti-Nazi. And in Schiller's *Don Carlos* there was the famous statement, "Sire, geben Sie Gedankenfreiheit," which the whole audience applauded like mad—that sort of thing existed, definitely yes.

There were private circles meeting and debating [Egon] Schiele paintings, or Kokoschka, and there was absolutely enormous attendance at the exhibition of *Entartete Kunst*. They played the *Threepenny Opera* so often that these people got suspicious. Why were so many people playing this time and again? There was the cabaret, and so on. It was really quite remarkable, and the right people

soon understood each other.

SMITH: Did you have any connections with [Hans] Sedlmayr, [Josef] Strzygowski, or [Julius] von Schlosser?

SEKLER: Well, only indirectly. Ginhart was a Strzygowski pupil whom I admired in a way because he was such a good teacher of art history and he certainly whetted my appetite. He was for a while removed, but then he came back when I was an assistant and he told me what a terrible person Strzygowski had been, humanly, and how he had treated his assistants. He apparently was a really awful human being. Not surprisingly, one of his sons, I believe, committed suicide. Otto Ado, a very great art historian, was also a Strzygowski assistant. So I read a lot of Strzygowski and I heard a lot about him. It almost got me kicked out of the Warburg Institute when I finally got over there, you know. There I was, talking about Strzygowski to Saxl!

I only went once or twice to the university to hear Sedlmayr lecture, and having read some of his stuff I had developed such a dislike for him that I didn't go again. Though I must say, grudgingly, that I admired his writings about [Johann Bernhard] Fischer von Erlach, and especially his earlier writings about Riegl. But he really was a very bright man who had gone astray. After the war I wrote a very scathing review of *Verlust der Mitte*, but it was never published. I forget whom I gave it to; they weren't willing to pan Sedlmayr, and maybe the

review was too biased on my part, too strong. I had much more contact afterwards with [Karl] Swoboda, you know, who was for many years the *Ordinarius*, and with his chief assistant, Renate Wagner-Rieger, who was instrumental in doing that wonderful *Ringstrasse Werk*, you know, the many volumes?

SMITH: Right.

SEKLER: You must have come across that because there's also the volume about the culture of the Ringstrasse. While Ginhart was away there was for a while an architectural historian and conservator named [Emil] Hoppe occupying that chair. I took a seminar with him and we became friends. He made wonderful measured drawings and he had a very balanced approach to architectural history. And then, after Theuer, my next boss at that institute was Michel Engelhart, the son of a rather famous Austrian painter [Josef Engelhart], an impressionist who had studied in Paris and who painted a lot of very typical Viennese scenes. He was a really good painter, and he was one of the founders of the Vienna Secession; this was the old Engelhart. The son Engelhart was very much concerned with historic conservation, however, he also had a great artistic gift for drawing, rendering, and watercolors. So we understood each other very well and I learned something from him. He had worked at St Stephen's before the war. He had done some measured drawings there, and he restored the

Burgtheater in Vienna and the Palais Schwarzenberg. I didn't work in his studio, but in each case I went with him and he showed me what he was doing—and he advised me when I did the little church. Engelhart also was a great anti-Nazi; that's why we understood each other very well. He unfortunately died from lung disease, so he didn't stay very long at the Technical University. But he was like Holey; they were people who helped me and understood me, and got me the necessary leaves of absence so I could go to England and later to the States.

SMITH: I'm making an assumption in this question and it may be an incorrect assumption, but when did you become a modernist?

SEKLER: I think it's fair to say it was in England. England was like a revelation because the Architectural Association was there, a hotbed of the modern movement. I met designers of importance there, people like Maxwell Fry, the MARS group [Modern Architectural Research Group], which was the English branch of CIAM [International Congress of Modern Architecture]. The CIAM congress came to England in '47 and I was sent there by one of my teachers. I not only went to the Warburg, but also for a while I went to something which was called the School of Planning and Regional Research. It doesn't exist anymore. They were mostly ex-servicemen there, who had come back from the war and were now in the design profession, learning about town planning. The funny thing was, I did one exam which was a layout for a housing

estate, and I was particularly good at that, so I got praised for what I had learnt in Vienna from Ilz: how you place these houses so they make a nice space and so on. But this is just a footnote.

One of the principals of that school was Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, a very remarkable woman, who later also taught at Harvard. She was a landscape architect and planner, and she took me under her wing too and pointed me in some of the right directions, and introduced me to some of the right people, especially at the Architectural Association. I saw how these people planned and designed. This was a very exciting time, these first postwar years. We were going to build the New Jerusalem. A real golden age was finally coming. The evil empire had been defeated and everywhere there would be good housing and social justice. We really believed that and we were very happy about it.

My main teacher at the Warburg Institute was Rudolf Wittkower. His wife [Margot] had studied architecture in Berlin and he had a great interest in modern architecture. He was a great scholar and that was where his work was, but we would go together to look at modern buildings, and unequivocally I would call him a modernist in his attitudes. I learned about Walter Gropius, who had been in England and had worked with Maxwell Fry, and above all there was Le Corbusier.

SMITH: Had you known about the Bauhaus before?

SEKLER: Hardly, hardly. So, when I came back from England, I was like a pioneer in Vienna at the Technical University. I brought all these new ideas—of course not single-handedly. By that time there were periodicals and so on, but if you look at my publications, the early ones, there is a lot which is purely communicating the new to people who didn't know it, or hardly knew it. There was an Austrian CIAM group formed; there was [Oswald] Haerdtl in Vienna, who was not at the Technik but at another school. He had been Hoffmann's chief assistant and he knew what modern architecture was all about. He did some fairly good buildings in Vienna at that time. There were a few good architects in Vienna who knew what modernism was: [Max] Fellerer, as I said, Haerdtl—not many. So there was a core, and there was certainly an echo to what I had to tell them, especially also about housing and planning, there was a great interest in that, and England was leading at the time.

SMITH: What was it about Corbusier that was so appealing to you?

SEKLER: Well, I think what was appealing to everybody. If you read *Vers une architecture*—even in the bad English translation, but I read it in the original—as one architect once said, it made you want to pack up and go and join him. There was this calling in there: let's make a new world; let's make a new architecture; the time is ripe. "Architecture or revolution." It was just a wonderful manifesto. It still grips you today, even though you know now, historically, about all the

things that are erroneous there, that are time-bound and single-minded and so on. The man just had a way of writing; he was a born preacher. Then if you got to see something like the Marseilles Unité, or Ronchamp . . . It is very hard in retrospect to reconstruct that sense of wonderment that anyone could design things like that.

SMITH: Did you have strong feelings about Gropius or [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe, or [Henrik] Berlage in the Netherlands?

SEKLER: Certainly less about Berlage; I didn't know much about him. I only learned about him historically speaking; it would rather have been De Stijl in Holland—[J. J. P.] Oud and the others. Yes, it was a revelation to see the De Stijl buildings in Holland. There was a housing and town planning congress in Amsterdam, I think, when I went there, and there were excursions, so I could see all those buildings, which were extremely impressive to me. Again, it was good architecture and I hadn't seen anything like it before. Mies I didn't see; he came later, when I came to this country. And Gropius . . . I read what he had written about education. He was more interesting to the educator part of me. I didn't know too much about his architecture, but I understood that he was a great man, a great teacher, and I actually wanted to study under him. It was bad luck. I mean he did get a recommendation from Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, who knew him quite well, but he wrote back he was just retiring; I was too late.

Another important figure now appears in the picture, and that was Sigfried Giedion. Giedion was very close with Tyrwhitt. She acted often as his secretary and a quiet help behind the scenes and so on. These two certainly opened doors for me. I ran into *Space, Time and Architecture*. I had never heard about this book before. It was a long time before it was translated into German. Again, this was like Le Corbusier. When I read *Space, Time and Architecture* at that time it was a revelation. I wrote a glowing review about it. I understand why, for a while, in every architecture school in this country, that was the book that was lying on the drafting board. Giedion was also a fascinating figure personally, and you could learn from him to have a scent for where the new was that was worth pursuing. He had this intuition that was admirable.

SMITH: This may sound like an obvious question, but what did modernism mean to you? How would you have defined modernism?

SEKLER: Well, first of all, I wouldn't have called it modernism. In English I would have called it the modern movement, and in German *das Neue Bauen*. It meant design that was evolved from human needs, that was very socially conscious and grew out of a very careful consideration of all the human functions, including the psychic functions. It would not mean just a crude understanding of needs, like what is the shortest path to the toilet, but an understanding of what makes a really habitable environment. It would be an

environment of social justice, which meant that there would be housing for everyone, and a community center, a health center, and so on. That, in a nutshell, was the credo.

Of course this meant a complete revision from any copying of historic forms. It is true there was this bugaboo about history. Gropius explained it to me personally when I finally met him here. He was not against history per se, he just said, "You shouldn't inhibit students when they begin. Let them develop, and once they've found their own way, then expose to them the riches of history." Which is a little different from just saying, "No history." But, you see, if you came from a place like Vienna, being aware of the Nazi background, also of German architecture, of course historicism was the enemy. People still wanted pilasters and columns, even if they were slightly pared-down columns, but fundamentally this was historicism. Or it was what we call *Blut-und-Boden Architektur*, you know, pseudopeasant houses; so that's what we were fighting.

SMITH: Was there a *Heimatstil* movement in Austria?

SEKLER: There was always an undercurrent of that. Because that is what a lot of the bureaucrats, who are so important in the building process in any country, had grown up with, and, after all, they were supposed to protect their provinces. The buildings were supposed to fit into the landscape. Crudely expressed, this meant pseudo-Tyrolean houses, even where they didn't fit into the landscape at

all. That was the sort of thing that was preached in Germany. On the positive side, these people knew very well how to build, so the buildings didn't leak, and the connection at the eaves was correct, but they were definitely reactionary.

Once, I had a fight in Vienna. I designed a telephone exchange in a suburb where they had vineyards, and of course I didn't want to make a pseudo-winery type of house, a pseudo-lower Austrian peasant house; I made an industrial building. I just made it very reticent and in proportions where it wouldn't stick out, with a flat roof. I had a hard time selling that to the people in the administration who had to accept the design. You submit your designs and they have to be approved, not only by the client but by the bureaucrats.

Fortunately, I could find some older buildings in the neighborhood with flat roofs, so I had a precedent. Never mind that those were insignificant buildings—garages and things like that. I could say, "Look, in this environment there are flat roofs, and if I make a peaked roof it will stand out much more; it will be much more visible." So I succeeded. Now it's very bad in some of the Austrian *Länder*. Architects complain bitterly about being stifled by the so-called *Heimatstilschutz*.

SMITH: After the war, in '45, with the Austrian reconstruction, were you involved actively in planning?

SEKLER: Yes. Above all, I had learned things that must have been forgotten,

or maybe were developed in the meantime, in that school for planning.

Eventually I was made an honorary corresponding member of the Town Planning Institute in London, and so for a while people really were very eager to hear what I had to say about planning. I didn't stay with that because it didn't really fundamentally interest me very much; I wanted to design buildings. But I did get several jobs from the municipality of Vienna. Probably it helped that I had been a collaborator of *Der Aufbau*, which was their periodical after all, and I wrote a lot in there. And so my first job, other than the church and a little shop in Vienna, was a municipal housing complex, which was subsidized housing. You didn't have too much latitude because for economic reasons when you got the commission you got quite a batch of norms and rules: room sizes were set; maximum square meterage was set; dwelling types had to be either A, B, or C, which meant either a studio apartment or a three-room apartment, and so on. So it became really a puzzle to figure out what you could do within these boundaries. You had standardized window sizes—eventually even the staircases were standardized. When I began, fortunately there was a little more freedom and I could still do things which later were not possible. So I did a number of jobs.

A slightly younger colleague, Herbert Prehler, and I were given a job together. The city often did that. In order to keep a lot of architects busy, if

they had a bigger job they would say, "Okay, you three people do that." But Prehsler and I somehow were of the same spirit. I sent him to a CIAM summer school in Venice, he loved it, and we were both convinced about the modern movement. That job we worked on together involved the rehabilitation of what had become a little slum in the third district, Alt Erdberg. I made the layout plan for the whole group [of buildings], which was really urbanistic planning, and at that time I introduced the first free-standing tall slabs in Vienna as housing elements—three parallel slabs. This came as a revelation because up to then people were still thinking in terms of the *Höfe*, you know, like the prewar, courtyard kind of buildings. Amusingly, now they return to the *Höfe* concept and slabs are taboo. So things change.

SMITH: How tall were they?

SEKLER: They were eight floors and a penthouse, recessed. They have survived well and people love living in them.

SMITH: Apartments on either side?

SEKLER: Yes. It was a very economical plan, with staircases inside, and every apartment had a loggia. The penthouses were reserved for artists; some of them are still in there, because they have a lovely view over Vienna. The penthouses were set back, so they had terraces; it was pretty good. I wouldn't mind moving in there myself. Prehsler is still my friend and we work together when the

occasion arises. We did another group of buildings in another part of Vienna; they were very much like, I hope, the best Swiss, or Swedish examples of the time. They had sloping roofs, but they were staggered, and at the same time slightly curving, so people had more privacy, and in the re-entrant angle between two houses you would have your balcony, or loggia, which created [interesting] spaces.

I always employed an artist, mostly the sculptor who had become quite well known in Austria, Wander Bertoni, an Italian, who had come to Vienna as a forced laborer. It was discovered that he had much artistic talent, and after the war he studied with [Fritz] Wotruba and became a very significant sculptor. I gave him his first job, and for two of my building groups he did fountains. It was a great pleasure to do these things.

SMITH: Did you have any historicist concerns at all when you were designing these buildings?

SEKLER: You mean, their relation to the historic neighborhood?

SMITH: Well, that, yes, but also in terms of the design of the structures or their layout—some kind of reflection?

SEKLER: I don't think so, no.

SMITH: What about the relationship to the rest of the neighborhood?

SEKLER: With that we were very careful. For example, with that one group

that had the three slabs, there was a little chapel down there somewhere, so the layout was such that you had a sight line right to the chapel. Then there was a transition made from one of the tall slabs with a bridge, which actually had a hall in there for community meetings, to a lower block that already had a peaked roof, because that made the transition to the older buildings that followed over there. So there wasn't a clash between this and that, but there was a transitional element in there.

SMITH: In the U.S. and in the U.K. as well, one of the distinctions between prewar and postwar modern movement housing complexes concerns the question of integration with the surrounding neighborhood. It is said that in the postwar period that integration was lost.

SEKLER: Well, it was rediscovered in the CIAM meetings. In the last CIAM meetings there was a lot of talk from the British members about that, about how they should respond to the historic setting. But certainly the discussion was not as strong as what followed, when this became an overriding concern.

[Tape II, Side One]

SEKLER: I had a chance to do the remodeling of a genuine historic building, Castle Wartenstein, which is on a hill, about one hundred miles south of Vienna, where the mountains begin. It was a real medieval castle which had been bought by the Wenner-Gren Foundation [for Anthropological Research], which is an

anthropological foundation with its seat in New York. It had been worked on by other architects earlier. There had been one architect in the late nineteenth century who had sort of romantically medievalized it all over again, with little turrets and battlements. But the substance of the historic stuff was there: really wonderful thick walls, and a very irregular courtyard. They wanted to make it more attractive and livable for the group of scholars who would come there a few times a year. Two or three times a year they had a symposium there, and they were really cooped up, and that was the idea; the director had bought this castle so the people would be together in a situation where they would be forced to interact. They got only one excursion to Vienna. They were taken to the opera there, in the evening, as a reward. But otherwise they had to stay in this castle or in their dormitories nearby. It was related to me that tensions developed and there were quite interesting psychological results. So they wanted a really nice lounge—that was my first job—then they also, of course, wanted a bar, and to create a lounge I had to knock out a lot of the nineteenth-century partitions that had been put into the vaulted medieval wing. Fortunately the vaults had not been touched, so I ended up with a reasonably big hall that had wonderful vaults.

The question of how to make this really attractive was probably the job I liked most, because I could do everything. I designed all the furniture, and I got Mirko Basaldella, who was at that time teaching here at Harvard University, to

do a Gobelin tapestry and a piece of sculpture to put over the fireplace. I created a fireplace that was absolutely integrated. You would never know that it wasn't there before, but it wasn't historicizing; it was just very strictly functional, it drew wonderfully, and on top of it was the metal sculpture by Basaldella. All of this has been now dislocated and destroyed because the Wenner-Gren Foundation sold that castle to some Texas millionaire. It turned out that the anthropologists loved the lounge so much they eventually wanted to have all their meetings there and not in their meeting room. I then reworked the meeting room also, and I discovered why they didn't like it. It had a gigantic round table with a green cloth over it, but it had a miserable lighting arrangement which blinded those people. The ceiling was dark, there was a lot of dark wood, and strong lights came down, giving the feeling of a third degree, you know. It was no wonder that these people got nervous and unpleasant and argued with each other. So I made a fundamental change there. I changed the light sources and strengthened the overall light intensity so the blinding glare effect wouldn't occur. Then I made lamps that gave them little pools of light, like in a restaurant or a coffee house. It worked; they were quite happy afterwards. So with all these things there was no historicism; I never tried to make medieval forms or echoes there, but I tried very hard to integrate the new with the old.

SMITH: Were you involved at all with the reorganization of the Vienna

Secession?

SEKLER: No, not really. I knew the people. I went there and I used the archive for example, but I was not a member. I know of course that Josef Hoffmann was their president for a while, after the war. Then I would go to the carnival events there. I had links, but I was not directly involved.

SMITH: Did you know Hoffmann before he died? Had you met him?

SEKLER: Yes, I knew him. I had met him quite a few years before he died, and I was aware of what he was doing. He wasn't doing very much anymore, partly because he was a persona non grata politically for quite a while, though he had not been a Nazi, I can vouch for that. But he, like all architects, liked to get a commission, and so he was playing along. In his family there were members who were violent Nazis, but he didn't approve of that; he was too intelligent. He had known too much of the world, and he had Jewish friends and clients. His whole career would have been impossible without all his Jewish clients. He was politically rather innocent; he didn't really understand what was going on. He didn't have any great commissions, but after the war he became the Austrian commissioner for the Biennale in Venice, and he certainly did his best to help young talent. He really believed in that. With any young person who came to him, wanting to show him something, if he scented a little talent he would immediately try to help.

SMITH: It would strike me that in some ways he would be an ambivalent figure for someone younger who was interested in the modern movement, because his best buildings were luxury buildings.

SEKLER: Yes, yes.

SMITH: And there was the implicit classicism.

SEKLER: Yes, that's right, but he very much welcomed young talent. I mentioned Haerdtl before, his chief assistant. In his work, there were very few luxury buildings; he did mostly restaurants and adaptations and so on, and they were all strict modern movement. Hoffmann was the first in Austria to appreciate Le Corbusier. Again, recognizing talent in a young person. But Hoffmann wasn't very prominent. There were others who got the big commissions and who played the big roles.

SMITH: So, at this time, in the immediate postwar period, you had not yet developed that strong interest in Hoffmann?

SEKLER: No, certainly not.

SMITH: Did you know the work of [Frank Lloyd] Wright or [Konstantin] Melnikov?

SEKLER: Wright I did, yes. In fact when Wright died I wrote an obituary, an illustrated thing in the *Aufbau* in memory of him. I lectured about him, and I went to pay my respects to him. I went to Taliesin East on my first trip to this

country, which must have been '54, roughly. He invited me, and he was very kind, I must say. I had been warned that he would be arrogant and impossible, which wasn't at all the case because I was a young chap and no danger to him. He knew something about Austria. He said, "Oh, you had a great architect there, Professor Wagner." Which impressed me, and he said, "You do housing much better than we do here. You must come to Arizona." He was just moving at that moment from Taliesin East to Taliesin West, in Arizona. I did go there, eventually, which wasn't easy because I was traveling mostly by Greyhound at that time, being fairly penniless. So I saw him again, in Taliesin West, and again he was very kind. He invited me to stay with them for tea or for dinner, and one of his disciples had picked me up in Phoenix and had to take me back, because there was no other way of getting out there. He didn't even have a telephone; he had to communicate by wireless with the downtown office. I was deeply impressed. Obviously, the man had tremendous charisma, and then again to see that architecture—I had never seen anything like that. If you are a young architect, that really means something to you; it really shakes you up. No, it really was a great experience, which I treasure. He gave me introduction to his building superintendents so that I could see his buildings. The Guggenheim was just at that time being constructed. I was there when it was under construction. The other one was the Price Tower, in Oklahoma. I also saw the Johnson Wax

Building. I made a real Wright pilgrimage, and I was very impressed—I still am. On that occasion I also visited Mies van der Rohe in Chicago.

SMITH: What about Melnikov?

SEKLER: Melnikov I only discovered later. I didn't know a thing about him, nothing.

SMITH: Perhaps we should shift subjects, on to London. How did you get to go to London?

SEKLER: I got the first British Council scholarship that was given in postwar Austria, and that was a fantastic thing. You have to realize what it meant. You were locked up for many years, not able to leave the country. Somebody who hasn't lived through such conditions can't realize what it means. And in '45, too, there was the Allied occupation. You couldn't move around freely; you had to have a laissez-passer, and in most countries you wouldn't be welcomed, they wouldn't let you in yet. So to be able to go to England was fantastic.

I mentioned I was a very enthusiastic boy scout. I had been to a jamboree, I had seen Baden-Powell, I had pen pals, you know, and some of my best friends from the Schotten had emigrated to England. One of them had served in the British army, in the commandos, and he smashed up his foot. We had been really very great friends, and to be able to see each other again after the war was a wonderful thing. In fact, for the first few months, I stayed with him

in St. Albans and then I found a place in London because the commuting became too much of a drain.

There were others, too. Marianne Kalbeck was the sister of a schoolfriend from the Schotten. Her father was a very famous stage director and critic, Max Kalbeck. I stayed for quite a while in the house where Käthe Breuer lived, the daughter-in-law of Josef Breuer. She had a real salon there, this old, white-haired lady, where a lot of important cultural figures, émigrés, would come. There was the painter [Sebastian] Issep, medical people, musicians, a famous quartet—I forgot the name. So there was a very special kind of atmosphere. I lived in the basement, in the "area" as it's called—you know those London houses where in front of the facade a wide ditch is excavated which acts as a little light well, so to speak, and in there is a tiny apartment where the janitors used to live. But it was a very happy time and I didn't know anything about the academic educational system in England. I had a British Council adviser there, a wonderful woman, Marion Carr, who had difficulties moving around because she had infantile paralysis. Her job was to take care of the British Council stipendiaries and see that they got into the right places, make sure they survived. It was still tough in postwar London. You had to get meal tickets for food, and as a bachelor you didn't get very many tickets. You know, two eggs per week and maybe five or six ounces of bacon. But Marion found a place

for me in the Warburg Institute, since I was a postgraduate and I had a diploma from Vienna. Only in retrospect did I realize what a blessing that was.

SMITH: So it wasn't your choice to go to the Warburg.

SEKLER: No, I had no choice in this matter. They just asked me what my interests were and what I had done before, and I guess the Vienna British Council, too, must have corresponded and found out what I had been doing, so I was put in this School of Planning and Regional Research, and the Warburg Institute. On my own I went and took evening classes in watercolor in the Regent Street Polytechnic from a little old English watercolor man. The first thing he taught us was how to stretch your paper and then he put a reproduction of a [John Sell] Cotman in front of us and said, "Now you copy that." [laughter] Then we found out how tough that was. When you try to put these washes down and they don't look anything like Cotman. That was very nice. I learned something from him about watercolors. When I left he said, "One thing is important, go on doing it. Don't ever stop, because you'll lose it. Never mind if it isn't good, just go on doing it."

The Warburg was of course wonderful; I didn't realize then how wonderful it was. All these people became famous: [E. H.] Gombrich, [Frances] Yates, [Charles] Mitchell, Rudolf Wittkower; they were all there. We were in the old Imperial Institute building that doesn't stand anymore. It was the

most awful Victorian building in South Kensington, near the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was one of those striated buildings, sort of reeking with fear and disinfectant, because it was mostly used as the examination halls for London University. So we were in one wing on one side, and we would always see those big herds of people moving into the big halls there, sitting for their exams, moving past the statue of Queen Victoria, life-sized, in white marble, standing on one side; it was surrealistic.

Oh, I forgot to mention [Fritz] Saxl, whom you didn't see much, and [Gertrud] Bing, who became the next director—you saw more of her—and there was a very nice secretary who helped me a lot, Annemarie Meyer was her name. Saxl was a little uncanny because you never heard him coming. He wore sneaker type shoes. The Warburg Institute was along one long corridor, and the books were in there, rows and rows of books, wonderful for browsing, and they were organized according to this system that Warburg had worked out. There was also a photographic collection there. Before you knew it, suddenly Saxl was behind you, like a spirit descending. He would just enquire as to what you were doing, or what you were reading and so on. He would say to me in German, "Lassen Sie sich auf nichts zu ein"—Don't get embroiled with fantastic speculations. Stay with the historic facts. It was good advice for a young chap who was quite overcome with this wealth of possibilities. Saxl died fairly soon. Maybe he

seemed so uncanny because he was dealing with alchemy and astrology in his research. The next director was a wonderful man, [Henri] Frankfort. His focus was Mesopotamia. It was just wonderful to talk to him. You learned a lot in this place by osmosis. We had lunch in what we called the witch's kitchen, which was down in the basement where women of an undefinable age, if you were not very fast stopping them, would ladle on every dish a big serving of brown gravy that gave to everything the same color and taste. I remember Gombrich and I ate together there often, sort of commiserating. But the conversation was very good.

I just learned a lot of what real scholars are from the way these people worked. [Otto] Kurz, the librarian, was a real polyhistor. If you were really stuck and wanted to find out what pine cones in a circle with a star in the middle meant and nobody knew, you went to Kurz and he would think a moment and then tell you where to look. Sure enough, there it was. You know, they were strong on iconography. And Enriquetta Frankfort (née Harris), Henri Frankfort's wife, was the head of the photographic collection, which was a treasure house.

Of course for me the really important event was when, after the first six months or so, Wittkower appeared—he had been in Italy. He took me under his wing and began steering me in the right direction with my dissertation. As I said, these people weren't yet famous at that time, so I had the good luck that

they had time enough for me. Wittkower would regularly invite me to his house, where his wife would cook dinner, and of course we often spoke German, and then he would go over a chapter or an outline with me in his study there, very carefully, and I learned what a close reading of a text really meant. I was writing about staircases and I had collected statements about staircases from all the Renaissance theorists. I made some conclusions and so on, and then Rudi would point out to me, "Wait a moment, you have to be careful here. Read it again. You'll see that really it can also be read in this way"—that sort of thing.

He held my hand and guided me in the literature, just like Theuer had done, saying, "Well, you know, there's one book you really have to read; it's tough." I remember that advice. I read the book in German, fortunately. It was [Paul] Frankl's *Entwicklungsphasen der neueren Baukunst*, which was translated into English by James O'Gorman [*Principles of Architectural History*]. I show it to students sometimes. It's still a very tough book to read, though it reads much easier in English, which is not surprising; that's what English does to you. It certainly was an extremely valuable lesson to be introduced to that.

[Leopold] Ettlinger also came to the Warburg at that time. We would go on excursions on weekends, go to historic buildings, and we had a wonderful time. At that time there was very little traffic in the roads. You would go by a Green Line bus to Sevenoaks or to Igtham Moat or further out. At that time the

rail network functioned very well, and so we looked at things and talked about them, or we walked in the city on the weekend, when there was no traffic, looking at the historic buildings or at ruins. So I really got steeped there in the kind of stylistic analysis and spatial analysis that was the leading edge at that time.

SMITH: Your walks in the city must have been reflected in some ways in your book on Wren [*Wren and His Place in European Architecture* (1956)].

SEKLER: Yes, definitely. I also walked by myself on weekends, when I could really look at those churches. I just loved them and that book was really written because I was annoyed that nobody recognized that in these churches there were baroque motifs. You know, I am exaggerating, but baroque was a dirty word in England. Supposedly baroque was continental, and nobody had recognized how much Wren really owed to the French baroque, [François] Mansart, and the Italian baroque, Bernini. So I thought, "I really have to tell them." We were very much aware at the Warburg how insular English art history was. There was a lot of connoisseurship there, fantastic of course, and wonderful archaeology, but what had been worked out by generations of German-speaking and Italian art historians hardly touched them; it was suspect. The great joke: Space is an invention of the German art historians. So that, to some degree, and also the fact that in Austria nobody knew anything about Wren, motivated me to write that

book about Wren. I wanted to show that he has to be seen in a European framework, not in an insular framework only, as all the previous books had done.

SMITH: Was there any connection to the book that Wittkower and Saxl did, *British Art and the Mediterranean*?

SEKLER: That was an exhibition, originally. I knew that book very well, and it also certainly influenced me in my own thinking about pedagogic exhibitions.

Later, when I became director of the Carpenter Center [for the Visual Arts, Harvard University], that was one of the things at the back of my mind, that you can make exhibitions that are not just visually beautiful or that are dedicated to the work of one artist, but you can have a topic. Now this is banal, this is commonplace. Everybody does it. But at that time that wasn't so frequent.

SMITH: So you decided that you were going to become an architectural historian as well as a practicing architect?

SEKLER: That's true. I wouldn't even say I decided; it sort of happened gradually. I found that I tremendously enjoyed dealing with the material, which also was the blessing at the Warburg; in that library you could lay your hands on the original editions without much difficulty. They had the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century volumes there, the architectural theorists, and what you didn't see there you could of course go see in the British Museum. But a lot was just there in the stacks and you could take books out; this was something that

Wittkower encouraged. One communion with one original is worth much more than all the books that have been written about it.

SMITH: It sounds like much of the education at the Warburg was really informal, rather than in classes.

SEKLER: Oh, definitely. There were no classes; that was the beauty of the Warburg. The classes were at the Courtauld Institute, for undergraduates and masters students. At the Warburg nowadays they have some seminars there. They had to take some teaching on, but at that time it was strictly postgraduate, and the most you would get would be an occasional lecture from somebody who came from their circle.

SMITH: So there weren't even seminars when you were there?

SEKLER: No, and there were very few students. Very few other postgraduates.

SMITH: So the form of education would be mentor-tutor?

SEKLER: Yes, absolutely. You could talk to anyone; it was like a family. You got invited to the homes of most of these people. Especially the female ones would take pity on me, since they knew I had a hard time surviving alone in post-war London. They would invite me for dinner, and of course we would always talk shop—each one about their particular interest. The curator of photography, Enriqueta Harris, as she was known, was a great specialist in Spanish painting. I think she was half Spanish. Mitchell was at that time working on Alberti in

Rimini, the Tempio Malatestiano. Frances Yates must have been working on her book on memory.

SMITH: Was the everyday language that you used there German or English?

SEKLER: I think it was English—yes, it was English. It was just that when I was with Wittkower I would speak German at times, especially at his home, not necessarily in the institute. There were, after all, people who only knew English there—you know, secretaries, librarians, visiting scholars, and you didn't want to exclude those. But I remember that Saxl said, "Lassen Sie sich auf nichts zu ein" in German and not in English. [laughter]

SMITH: So Wittkower was your dissertation director?

SEKLER: Yes, and the second reader was Sir Geoffrey Webb, who was the head of the Historic Monuments Commission, and I think he oversaw what later became the photographic archives of British architecture—it's a separate organization now. Webb was a medievalist. He did this volume on English medieval architecture, in the Pelican series. He was as English as can be. I think he had been in the navy during the war. As a special favor he would invite me to his favorite pub to have half a pint there. He was very, very nice and of course very knowledgeable about English architecture, very helpful about telling me where to find what.

I also should mention another figure from whom I learned a good deal—he

was not at the Warburg but was connected with it—and that was Nikolaus Pevsner. Pevsner only just at that time finally had gotten a reasonably good appointment. He had had a hard time, you know. For a long time he didn't have a good academic appointment at all, and then finally something happened. I don't remember who it was, but somebody said I ought to go and see Pevsner. Yes. It was because Pevsner was interested in staircases and that was my topic. We saw each other fairly frequently. I would go to some of his lectures, and I also met his wife. I found him very congenial, and I learned a lot from him. He wasn't my teacher directly but I learned simply from the contact with him, and from his enthusiasm for English buildings, which was very real.

SMITH: By that time he had written *Pioneers of Modern Design*, hadn't he?

SEKLER: I think so, yes.

SMITH: Did the story that he told in that book make sense to you?

SEKLER: Yes. Definitely, at that time, yes. Speaking of the modern movement, certainly Pevsner and I saw eye to eye in this direction. He was very interested in what I would tell him from central Europe, where he hadn't been for a long time. The same was true of a number of the other people; for them I was also a messenger for what postwar central Europe was like.

SMITH: And of course Austria has a different tradition than northern Germany or western Germany.

SEKLER: Yes, yes. And Pevsner was from Dresden, which is a very special place.

SMITH: How did you arrive at this topic of staircases?

SEKLER: I had fallen in love with the great baroque staircases in Austria, which are breathtaking: St. Florian, Belvedere in Vienna, the various palais in Vienna; it was the one feature they all had, and always with another variation. So I had already decided in Vienna that I would eventually write a dissertation about baroque staircases. Then came the scholarship to go to England. It wouldn't make sense to write about Austrian baroque staircases in England, but I still wanted to write about staircases. I felt this was such an important element in architecture. Also, I had decided I did not want the typical doctoral topic that just takes one small slice of something and goes into depth all about this one thing, which means a moment in time. Even the baroque staircase, let's say, or the late medieval choir ending, or something like that. Since I was in England I wanted a topic that would force me to become familiar with the whole of English architecture, and so I said I wanted to write about the English staircases.

Wittkower said it was all right, it was a good topic, so that's what I did.

SMITH: How did you pose the problem for yourself?

SEKLER: First of all, how did the staircase develop? How does it come from what seemed rather primitive medieval arrangements to get to the level of those

highly sophisticated seventeenth-century and highly elegant eighteenth-century staircases? Second, I was interested in the genetic process. How did changes come about? Who invented them? Looking at it, if you like, from the architect's point of view. Look, there's a new design solution—how come? That led to some very interesting discoveries. For example, the so-called *escalera imperial*, that type of staircase where you go up in the middle and then it branches—the most magnificent kind—or the one where the stairs come from two sides and go up to one staircase in the middle, indeed comes from Spain; it was invented there. Certain staircases of Inigo Jones's really came from Italy. I found one that was first developed in one of the *scuole* in Venice—I forget now which one it was.

Also, staircases pose very subtle construction problems, which interested me as an architect—especially those that are freely cantilevered out—you know, those elegant things which they called geometric stairs in the eighteenth century. They also pose interesting problems from the point of view of projective geometry. If you build those things in stone or wood, how do you draw them on the piece of wood or stone so that they will eventually fit in there? They may have a double curvature, they may go around and at the same time go up. That is as three-dimensional as you can get. That brought me to the question of stereotomy, the art of cutting the stone for vaults and curving parts.

Staircases turned out also to be a great topic for getting into the theorists. What did they have to say about staircases? That really was very revealing and sometimes very amusing: "Too many stairs and too many doors make the men thieves and the women whores"—a British sixteenth-century theorist wrote that. [laughter]

SMITH: What was the balance that you had to arrive at between formal analysis, technical analysis and then iconography, or the intellectual content of the stairs, if you want to call it that?

SEKLER: Yes, there is an iconography of stairs. Why were certain frescoes put on the king's or queen's staircase in Hampton Court? That's a typical example. Or at Versailles? There's quite a lot of material about that particular question. And how is light handled? There are those wonderful stairs at Ashburnham House, in London, where there's a cupola on top of the staircase and the light comes in from the ceiling; it's high sidelight. You don't see the source of light, but if you are on that stair you are in a channel of light. So there's a lot to stairs.

[Tape II, Side Two]

SEKLER: Wittkower guided me in a thorough and intelligent interpretation of the texts, as well as stylistic criticism—how the spaces had changed. This is Frankl's thinking, you know, from additive to divisive space. We examined how

the stylistic characteristics of the forms changed, which you could follow in those stairs very well, and sometimes you could make analogies or comparisons to other architectural elements there. I was especially concerned with the analysis of the spatial treatment, because the stair is such a three-dimensional element. You are really dealing with a spatial composition in a good staircase. Geoffrey Webb had more of the archaeologist's approach. He wanted to make sure that I didn't overlook any important examples and that I got the dating straight and had all the documentation—that sort of thing.

SMITH: Which is important.

SEKLER: Of course, yes. Put your nose to the ground. And he was very helpful in the medieval part of it, where I really needed guidance. I knew nothing about English medieval architecture.

SMITH: If we could go back to the Frankl concept of space, did you discuss the relationship of volume and mass?

SEKLER: Oh yes, definitely. How they answer to each other, and the nature of the relationship—whether it's directional or centralized, whether it's vertical or horizontal—that sort of thing.

SMITH: It has been said that the modern movement's concern for space replaces the concern for mass, and I'm wondering if that sort of process was taking place in your training at the Warburg.

SEKLER: Oh, sure. Just think of Pevsner's writings; it's all about space.

Wittkower certainly knew this way of thinking and also, if necessary, applied it.

Think of his wonderful article about the Laurentian stairs in Florence; there's a

lot of spatial analysis in there. Of course the Warburg people had a special

interest in the iconography and the humanistic tradition, which was less

interesting to Pevsner. Even in Vienna, space had already been a very important

element in the lectures I followed and in the literature I read. All that was

enhanced at the Warburg. There was, if you like, the German tradition of spatial

analysis that had been refined to a very high degree.

SMITH: In some of your writing I notice you use the term "critical analysis."

Do you mean by that spatial analysis?

SEKLER: Not only spatial, but also the tectonic expression. There we are back

at mass, and in architecture, that's so important. The two interact, especially in

baroque architecture. Also, I was at that time very much obsessed with relating

the cultural, intellectual and social background of the time to the forms and the

spaces of architecture. Pevsner had written about mannerism, and so had

Gombrich, incidentally. At first I absolutely swallowed the argument about

mannerism being the expression of world angst and uncertainty, you know, the

Counter-Reformation. Then I began to doubt that you could make such a simple

one-to-one correlation, that it was much more subtle and that it could only be

done in documented details. I guess that's where the admonition "Lassen Sie sich auf nichts ein" was quite salutary. It only sank in much later, though. Even in the Wren book I tried to see him against the seventeenth-century background: the new experimental philosophy on the one hand, yet still a real religiosity on the other and the tension between the two. I do think this is important for the understanding of architecture even today, but it has become more and more clear to me how difficult it is, and maybe it's impossible to do it 100 percent.

SMITH: You mention mannerism and that makes me think of Arnold Hauser's *The Social History of Art*. How was Hauser received at the Warburg?

SEKLER: I think I only read Hauser later. I was already skeptical and found that much of his argument didn't convince me, although I was impressed by his book. It's a tour de force and has a really wide sweep of things and there are certain detailed parts which I have quoted in lectures, but I have warned students not to take it all in without questions.

SMITH: It's a very seductive book because its argument is so well organized.

SEKLER: And so well written.

SMITH: That perhaps gets to what makes a successful art history book. Is it its ability to tell a story, or is there something else that you look for?

SEKLER: Well, I would say the fundamental condition, and I have said it before in other words, is how close it stays with and brings you to the object, to the

work, never mind whether it is architecture or painting or sculpture. That is the first rule. I am in that sense a pragmatist. I do believe that it isn't just all narration; that much depends on what you are narrating about. But then, of course, in part it also depends on your gift. In that sense I am of the school of [George Macaulay] Trevelyan, who believed that the historian should also write well. His *English Social History* is a joy; there are unforgettable passages in there. But there are few Trevelyans. If somebody who can't do it like that tries it, then it ends sadly or ridiculously.

SMITH: Wittkower was working on *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* at the time.

SEKLER: He was finishing it. He had already published articles that were later chapters.

SMITH: Did that pose a meaningful model to you, in terms of your own work?

SEKLER: It did impress me a great deal, through its arguments, because I had arrived at somewhat similar conclusions. You see, in this search to link the spiritual, social, and cultural background with the work, of course you have to think along such lines. But of course I was quite incapable of doing it in any really meaningful way, with my little preparation and little awareness of the complexities. So certainly in this respect Wittkower was quite a revelation. I talked to him about that later and he agreed that that was a crucial problem of the

modern movement, that there was not that spiritual source of unity there anymore. In fact it had been gone since the Enlightenment, gone forever; you could not reconstitute it. So what takes its place?

SMITH: You raise an interesting question. Why do you think modern architects became so enamored of that book, which sold out so quickly? I asked Joseph Rykwert this same question, so I'm interested in getting your understanding of it, as a practicing architect.

SEKLER: I want to make one comment here. In recent times I have read that Wittkower was trying to influence the architecture of his time. This is just hogwash. He was trying to write a sound scholarly book and that was all. He wanted to convince certain scholars about certain points. That architects jumped on this was a happy coincidence from his point of view. He would sell more books, but it was not written, like some other books, in order to convince contemporaries by using historic material. That was not Wittkower's type of scholarship; he was absolutely against that.

SMITH: It seems, on a surface reading, that it is not a book that makes any concessions to the contemporary reader.

SEKLER: No. It wasn't written like that; it wasn't meant like that. It was fundamentally a sequence of articles that had been published in the *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, with a few additional ones that he wrote later.

SMITH: But to me the writing is somewhat forbidding. That increases the question of why architects of the modern movement became so taken up with it. I would think they would have to decipher much of what he's writing.

SEKLER: I'm sure a lot of them never understood a lot of what he had been writing, or didn't have the patience to really read it closely, as it has to be read. But on the other hand, I do think that it gave them something to hold on to. First of all, the corroboration that proportion was something important. And that's very nice to know for an architect—that there isn't just a toying around with geometric figures, but that meaning can attach to them. When you draw plans as an architect you are drawing geometric figures, so you can see how in an architect's mind there would be certain connections made with this book, even if in reality they are very tenuous. The architect could see the book as an inspiration in this sense, and he could then argue that now our geometry relates to other meanings—but it still does really relate to meanings. It's very depressing not to have the conviction that you are designing something meaningful, something that also carries a meaning. It's not only meaningful in the sense that it's useful to people and makes them happy, but it is also a symbolic form.

SMITH: But as soon as the argument started getting made that the architectural style of the modern movement was symbolic, didn't that begin to mean the decomposition of the modern movement as a progressive force? As soon as you

begin to see Mies's I-beams as not being functional at all but just symbolic, then the whole impetus for the modern movement comes into question.

SEKLER: But that attitude is only characteristic of one branch of the modern movement, the absolute rationalists, the most famous one being Hannes Meyer. He uses a mathematical formula: $\text{economy} \times \text{function} = \text{architecture}$, something like that. A few others felt the same way, like Hans Wittwer. But the people who came from the De Stijl movement were sure they were full of symbolism. They may not have made it explicit but we know today that De Stijl was a highly symbolic movement. We know that for Mondrian those lines went into the cosmos. If you read Le Corbusier, he wrote two volumes, the *Modulor*, and he goes back to the Pythagoreans. Of course, he never makes it explicit. He doesn't say, "I believe in this," but when you read it, it's poetically implicit that these are symbolic forms that have to do with music. He invents the *Modulor*, which is a proportion system. Well, that was quite close to the time when Wittkower was writing about proportion, but probably there is no connection whatsoever; it was just in the air. People wanted to be convinced that they were still capable of designing and creating symbolic forms. That's, after all, the highest vocation of architecture.

I don't know how many other people read it, but I certainly read [Ernst] Cassirer at that time. Also, Matila Ghyka was fashionable then, with all his

esoteric stuff, much of which I happen to think is nonsense. Giedion was plugging the Swiss Hans Kayser, who had written *Harmonikaler Teilungskanon*. It was a big volume where the Doric temples were analyzed in terms of musical harmonies and Goethe is quoted and the monochord was used. Giedion believed in that strongly; he brought it into the seminar. So that was in the air very much; it wasn't just Wittkower who turned the tide or anything; his book just happened to fit in with the interest in these things.

SMITH: The Enlightenment dissolved the principles that underlay humanist thinking, but doesn't the Enlightenment itself provide a whole set of symbols and a whole set of unities that drive both intellectual work in general but also architectural work? I'm thinking of the French abbé who—

SEKLER: [Marc-Antoine] Laugier.

SMITH: Laugier, exactly, yes, who in a sense laid the groundwork for the modern movement.

SEKLER: Well, Laugier was a rationalist, who said it all had to be natural and logical, and so on. On the other hand, I don't think that at that time many people were much concerned about Laugier; that came a little later. He is still now today very topical: the primitive hut and its explorations and what it meant in architectural history. At that time it would have been the social contract and the rights of man that motivated modern architects. Though, very soon there came

the rediscovery of this little book which [Emil] Kaufmann, the Austrian, wrote, *From Ledoux to Le Corbusier*; he was the first to make this connection. You get this whole discovery of the architects of the Enlightenment.

SMITH: So why wouldn't Enlightenment ideals that were so important to the modern movement, and to the Bauhaus in particular I think, not be sufficient to provide architects with a basis for their work?

SEKLER: I think for a while they were considered quite sufficient. But then doubts came in.

SMITH: When did the doubts start coming in, from your point of view?

SEKLER: Probably at the time when the so-called New Brutalism was running its course, and a crucial figure I think one could point to would be the Dutch architect [Aldo] van Eyck. He was talking at the last CIAM congress about the threshold, and all these terms had heavy symbolic meanings. He had discovered the architecture of the Dogon, that African tribe that builds sort of cave dwellings that have elaborate meanings, and he presented those or he brought somebody who presented this Dogon architecture at one of the CIAM congresses. So certainly he would be one of the figures that I would adduce as introducing the doubts quite forcefully; that pure rationalism was boring. He was the one who called Gropius a very boring architect, and in the Dutch periodical *Forum*, he tries to, in a sense, explode the modern movement. As did the whole group that

later called itself the follow-up on CIAM: [Jakob] Bakema, van Eyck, [Alison and Peter] Smithson—

SMITH: Oh, the Team X group?

SEKLER: Team X, yes. Some of them were still extreme rationalists, others not. So they really are the acid that dissolves the modern movement. What they did not at all ever fancy, or expect, was that the result would be postmodernism. This came as a great surprise and shock, but it was too late to do anything about it.

SMITH: I'm not sure that anything could have been done anyway.

SEKLER: Yes, who knows? I mean, that's second-guessing history.

SMITH: Yes. Or pop architecture. [Robert] Venturi is a key figure himself.

SEKLER: His *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* came out in 1966. In the same year I think, or soon thereafter, Aldo Rossi's *L'Architettura della città* came out, and within a couple of years these publications made themselves felt.

SMITH: It does seem it's the generation that's born in the 1920s, which is your generation, that tends to be the group that's dismantling the modern movement. I'm thinking of Reyner Banham's *Principles*—

SEKLER: But Reyner Banham is still really fighting for the modern movement. He is fighting for technology. You see, he is in another bailiwick from the

Venturis of this world.

SMITH: Yes, but doesn't his book, *The Principles of Architecture in the First Machine Age* deconstruct the older story?

SEKLER: A lot of the older story, that's right, but he doesn't deconstruct all the arguments. He still believes in technology as being the leading force. He just says, "Well, you will have to learn to run with it, to adopt."

SMITH: But again, by coming up with the point of view that it's not really functionalist, it's symbolic, isn't that really undercutting the intellectual ground on which the modern movement was based?

SEKLER: Well, you see your question only makes sense if you assume a monolithic modern movement, which never existed. I mean, there's a world of difference between a Le Corbusier and a Gropius and a Hugo Häring. It's typical that a real father of postmodernism, Robert Venturi, is American, just like the real father of the notion of a monolithic international style is Philip Johnson, another American. It is the great American attitude of understanding architectural movements as styling. Architects are the people who put a style on a building. You can follow that through the nineteenth century and even in the eighteenth century somewhat, but there it's still more unified because there's only one style, in a way, in which you built, which was one version of neoclassicism, or baroque classicism.

But in the nineteenth century you had this wonderful gamut of styles from which to choose, and the same architect could use several of those if he was a real master, and then the same thinking is simply transferred into the twentieth century. But a lot of the masters or pioneers of the modern movement did not want to create a new style. That was anathema to them. That was what they had been fighting all their lives. That's the big misunderstanding. So there was in the modern movement certainly one branch that was very much aware of the symbolic. Josef Frank wrote a book, *Architektur als Symbol*. He surely was not mainstream modern movement.

SMITH: I had wanted to ask you about the Cassirer influence at the Warburg. You mentioned that you read him, but was he talked about? Did his name come up as an authority for interpretation of space and form?

SEKLER: I frankly can't remember. I don't want to say something that may not be true.

SMITH: But that would imply that it probably didn't then.

SEKLER: He certainly wasn't in the forefront, otherwise I would remember it, but somebody must have pointed out Cassirer to me.

SMITH: He had been in Hamburg and he was quite important for [Erwin] Panofsky, and how Panofsky organized his classes.

SEKLER: Of course, yes. Panofsky certainly was mentioned. He was admired

and he came as a visitor from time to time.

SMITH: To what degree would somebody like [Ernst] Kantorowicz have been brought up, or [Wilhelm] Dilthey?

SEKLER: Dilthey I don't know, but Kantorowicz I remember from the Warburg.

SMITH: What would it have been about Kantorowicz's work that was attractive to the Warburg?

SEKLER: Frankly, I can't tell you. It's not architectural history, and I don't want to produce hot air.

SMITH: Yes, that's fine. I also interviewed Hugo Buchthal—

SEKLER: Oh yes. He was there at that time too. Buchthal. I'm sorry I forgot to mention him. Where is he now?

SMITH: He lives in London.

SEKLER: He's retired, but he still does research, I trust?

SMITH: Yes. One of the things that's quite clear, I guess you could say, with the art historians is the importance of the iconological tradition and the idea of antiquity setting up these norms that cannot be gotten away from.

SEKLER: Yes, absolutely.

SMITH: What relevance would, say, Greco-Roman antiquity have for architectural history?

SEKLER: Yes, like the exhibition *British Art and the Mediterranean*. In my mind, the two things were pretty much separated. However, as a question of method, I would always look, whether in architecture, or even with my staircases, to see if there were any motifs, but in architecture it really was a question of the survival of types more than forms. The literature about the dome, for example, discusses whether it's the heavenly sphere, the *Himmelszelt*, or a glorification symbol of an imperial dome. Of course much of it takes you back to antiquity, though not necessarily only to classical antiquity. It's the survival of motifs and types that your attention is drawn to once you start thinking along those lines, and of course it's very rich. In medieval architecture, where you don't expect it at all, you find that there is a classicism—in the Romanesque, for example. It's interesting for the architect that certain fundamental space types and building types can be followed from antiquity, if not prehistory, all the way up at least to the industrial revolution, and sometimes even beyond that. There are obvious examples. The typical Ringstrassen palais, like the one that stood opposite the opera house in Vienna, was foursquare with a courtyard and corner towers. So you can take that right back to the Roman villa and Roman *castellum*, and even to pre-Roman prototypes in antiquity.

SMITH: That brings me back to thinking about the questioning of the modern movement ideology. One of your students, William Curtis, is generally credited

in the literature with showing the degree to which the modern movement was a revival of classicist thinking and of traditional types, and it was a reinvigorating of these in new form. Was this something that was being discussed in your classes?

SEKLER: In the classes I was trying to encourage people—and this certainly also applied to William Curtis—to go for the basic principles, to try and distill those out, which had to do with the basic gestures, like moving in procession, or assembling around a focal point, be it a table, a sacred fire, or whatever it is. Louis Kahn has of course very poetically written about that and taught it to his students. I think that's what William is trying to convey, not a direct formal dependence; he is as loath of that as I am, because we think it is dangerous. It can easily be misunderstood and go the wrong way. But you can learn a lot of principles that help to create an authentic architecture, whatever that may mean. Authenticity in architecture means something. It means it really is not lifted off from somewhere else, but it stands on its own and pertains only to this particular case and place and time—it is genuine, in this sense. But at the same time it is embedded in the great family of architecture, what we denote when we say "architecture."

SMITH: But if you were to take the Miesian goal of creating a universal abstract enclosure that's absolutely repeatable because it is universal, is that excluded

from authenticity?

SEKLER: Well, once it was authentic for Mies, it couldn't possibly be authentic for anybody else. I think that's the answer. But we have to live with all the Miesian buildings. There are other examples. There are curtain-wall skyscrapers that, in their way, are also conditioned by technology, by what is needed at the time and place there, by the practical function of adding a lot of offices on top of each other, by wanting to convey a symbolism of something, and yet they don't look Miesian at all. Think of Hong Kong, for example. I. M. Pei did a wonderful skyscraper there that's absolutely stunning. So it's possible to create authentic buildings, but not by lifting somebody else's authenticity.

SMITH: So that means the architect always has an individual signature?

SEKLER: When it comes to what you might call monumental pieces, yes. But you know, Adolf Loos said, "When it comes to the house, forget architecture, just create a dwelling." It can be very modest and very anonymous, and yet good. But for lack of monumental tasks a lot of architects in our time have to show what they can do and what they would like to do in houses, so you get all those fantastic acts of architectural acrobatics that are fundamentally applied to the wrong object. But you can't blame them; it's their only chance.

SMITH: But they also have clients who have the money and the desire to have such houses.

SEKLER: Yes, so that's okay. I mean, I have nothing against it.

SMITH: Was Edgar Wind involved at the Warburg at the time you were there?

SEKLER: No, but he was often talked about. There had been connections, and he was a sort of Lucifer type of figure, you know: a great, sparkling mind, but slightly dangerous, maybe. I didn't know what they were referring to. I mean, I was never privy to what they thought was wrong about Wind, but I got this inkling that at least some of them felt that though he was admirable in many ways, there were also ways in which he was less admirable. He must have been a very difficult character. I don't know if somebody like Buchthal would know more about that. He was, after all, at that time already a member of the staff and I was only a graduate student.

SMITH: Buchthal did say that anybody who went to America was considered a traitor. And of course when he later went to America he said he got the same treatment.

SEKLER: It must have been true for Rudi too.

SMITH: Yes.

SEKLER: But then, almost nobody was left of the old guard. Saxl had died, Bing was director.

SMITH: Could you talk a little bit about Bing as a personality? Did she have the same kind of imposing intellectual stature that the others did?

SEKLER: I don't think so, but she was imposing in her own way. She had a very critical mind. She was a no-nonsense person, and very highly respected.

SMITH: Did she have a particular contribution to make in terms of the discussions at the Warburg? Were there things that she would bring up?

SEKLER: At the time I was there she wasn't director yet, and I can't remember what her role really was. I had few dealings with her before she was director, so I don't really have an answer to your question.

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[Tape III, Side One]

SMITH: I had a few more questions to ask you about the Warburg, before we go on. You had mentioned a little bit about Wittkower being interested in modern architecture. I'd like you to talk a bit more about that, your perception of his tastes, and how he aligned himself with the different tendencies within the modern movement.

SEKLER: He and his wife Margot were certainly very much interested in modern architecture. It was the beginnings of the modern movement in Germany, the very typical housing schemes. But Wittkower took a general interest in what was going on that the time. I remember him talking about Le Corbusier, and he sometimes was also quite skeptical about some of the things that were going on.

SMITH: That Corbu was doing or others?

SEKLER: No, others too. We talked a lot about what was being built in England at that time, and I remember we went together to the Festival of Britain; that was in '51, so I had already graduated, but for a number of years I came back every summer to England because I was working on the Wren book, and also I wanted to visit my friends there. I remember, we were quite impressed by the Festival of Britain architecture, which was this typical fifties architecture

—kidney shaped forms and sort of playful elements. I can't remember in detail, but I do remember that we were really positive about some of the buildings there and fairly critical about others. So there was a notion of what was good modern architecture and what was bad modern architecture, which to a large degree we shared.

SMITH: Did you have any discussions about the Bauhaus, its history and its program?

SEKLER: No, I certainly cannot remember anything like that. If we did, I forgot it. You see, my real atmosphere for modern architecture at that time was the Architectural Association, which was the avant-garde school. Though I was not enrolled there, I was a member of the AA, which I am still, and so I would see the projects there and I would talk to teachers and students and get a good idea of what was at that time the avant-garde of modern architecture. There certainly the Bauhaus was one of the things that was quite important. Gropius had done a school with Maxwell Fry in England. We went and looked at the first experiments in prefabrication that ended up in a famous scheme, the Hertfordshire Schools. I think I wrote about that in the *Aufbau*. It was really very impressive, because after the war a lot of schools had to be built quite in a hurry, and a group of architects had worked that out beautifully.

SMITH: Was there talk about prefabrication in Austria?

SEKLER: Yes, because the need was great. In fact, this was prefabrication only of one element, but on one occasion I was asked by the Vienna municipal building authorities to go to a factory in the Midlands somewhere, like in Derby or Leicester, where they had just developed a process of fabricating concrete roof tiles. The city of Vienna was considering buying a machine that could produce roof tiles in great numbers. So I went there and they produced a few tiles for me. I can still remember this big machine, how they fed cement and sand in it and at the end finally out came a little form, cut off, and so I reported back on what I had seen.

SMITH: Did you make a recommendation?

SEKLER: Not really, because I didn't know enough. I just reported that the machine worked and that these cement tiles seemed all right. I never found out whether, in practice, they really were happy elements. The city of Vienna eventually acquired a French system of prefabrication that worked with big elements, that would be hoisted into place—wall elements let's say—so that the outside of the buildings showed you that they were made up from these wall elements. People didn't like it because it was too prefabricated; they had a feeling it was too mass-produced and "soulless," so they discontinued it.

SMITH: In the United States I know several architects after '45 were involved in some sort of prefab scheme.

SEKLER: Yes. I know Gropius was, very much. In fact, I have a book here by Gilbert Herbert, who is in Israel, about the dream of the prefabricated houses [*The Dream of the Factory-Made House: Walter Gropius and Konrad Wachsmann*]. I think Herbert was with the United Container Corporation. They got their system all working, and then somehow, because of organizational and marketing difficulties, again it fizzled.

SMITH: Raphael Soriano worked with one of the airplane manufacturing companies.

SEKLER: Oh yes.

SMITH: I've read that in the U.S. it didn't work because of the nature of the private housing market.

SEKLER: Very much so, yes.

SMITH: But in Europe you had a different situation.

SEKLER: Also an important factor here was of course the trade unions; they were dead set against it. They insisted that certain things had to be installed by union labor, which of course vitiates the whole notion of prefabrication: nothing is to be installed; it is to come ready-made and put into place. We had in New England—and it may still exist in some way—the "TECHBUILT" system, which Carl Koch had designed. A number of houses were built which were sort of half-prefabricated. Where it really ends up working in this country is of course with

the mobile homes. They are completely prefabricated and people buy them.

SMITH: But in Europe you had much more government funding of housing.

SEKLER: Yes, exactly. In that case it was the city of Vienna.

SMITH: Yet it still didn't seem to catch on there. Was it a question of aesthetics?

SEKLER: I think partly it was question of not having a market for the necessary big numbers. Where it was done all the time, of course, and it worked but created awful places, was in all the iron curtain countries. In Czechoslovakia, you see Brno, or Olomouc—lovely old towns. Then at the outskirts you see these horrible new quarters, looking all the same; it was a Russian system I think there. But it was very well developed. They had the prefabricated bathrooms, and technically they were quite advanced, but you could see that it didn't make people happy. You had five of those buildings, absolutely identical, lined up, and another five over there. They were always lined up along straight lines because the building cranes moved on straight lines, so it created an atmosphere that wasn't conducive to feeling at home very much.

SMITH: One of David Gebhard's arguments is that the modern movement always was very much of an elite, minority kind of movement, and that the public itself preferred *moderne*, which didn't mean that it was antimodern, but that it had its own ideas about what the modern should be.

SEKLER: And people wanted houses that still looked to them like houses; they still do, and contractors and developers know that very well.

SMITH: So, at the time, did the architects and critics in the modern movement think about the public, or did you assume that the public would come around?

SEKLER: Well, I think we assumed the public could be educated. To be honest, that was very much the prevailing idea. Also, I must say, in England at that time they made big efforts at planning it. You know, the London County Council had its own housing department, and you found some of the best architects there; it was a great school for architects. They did some really lovely estates where indeed the little houses did look like "houses" to the people who moved into them. It was a judicious mixture where you might have two or three tower blocks like the one I wanted to build in Vienna, and then around them were the smaller ones, creating small spaces, like greens, staggered along the road. I think these still look good today. But they were not in such big numbers, and that was the secret; they had a human scale. Prefabrication's danger is that you lose the human scale.

SMITH: Getting back to the Warburg. Leopold Ettlinger was also somebody that you were close to; in fact, you said he got the Wren book published or helped get it published?

SEKLER: No, that was Henri Frankfort. If I said Ettlinger I had a slip of the

tongue. When I showed Frankfort parts of the book, with the photographs I had taken of the city churches, right in front of me he took the telephone and called up a friend of his at Faber and Faber and said, "I think there's something here that will interest you." So the next day I went there, and those were the good old days. They looked at the manuscript and the illustrations and there was a handshake. And that was it. There was never any trouble and they were extremely helpful. It was a pleasure. They were out there near Bedford Square, in one of those lovely houses. You always got a cup of tea, and it was very genteel and polite. Walter de la Mare, the great poet, was there, and you had this feeling of being in a very happy atmosphere. There was not much talk about the business end at all. As you must know, the publishing world has changed.

[laughter]

But Ettlinger and I became very great friends. I stayed with Ettls, as I called him—everybody called him Ettls—because he had a very big Victorian apartment in a Victorian terrace, not far from Notting Hill Gate. It was one of those very interesting Victorian developments where you had fairly tall terraced housing on all sides around a central private green area, which was only accessible from those houses. The tenants had keys. Toward the street it was typical Victorian row housing, but toward the rear it was a garden, and children were safe playing there. I lived in the attic of Ettlinger's apartment for quite a

while, so we saw a lot of each other. The attic leaked at times a little, but we had a wonderful time. [laughter]

Yesterday, I was thinking about a person who came as a special visiting scholar to the Warburg, a man named Harry Bober. He's dead now, unfortunately. His wife, Phyllis Bober, is an archaeologist—Samothrace or something. She was a beautiful woman with a big head of gold hair. Harry Bober and Ettls together could have been comics in any variety show. One joke followed the other, and they were so excellent in telling them. So they brightened the life at the Warburg. You know, you would be working, walking between the books in the Warburg library, and Harry Bober would be there: "Did you hear the latest one?" [laughter] But you also learned a lot from him. He was a very good medievalist—a manuscript man. And with Ettls, as I said, I took many excursions to buildings. He was very interested in the modern movement, and he had written about [Karl Friedrich] Schinkel. He took a lively interest in what was going on in modern architecture at the time.

SMITH: Did you have a special relationship with Gombrich, since you were both Viennese?

SEKLER: No, I wouldn't say that. I think he was very nice to everybody, in a sense. As I said, we would often go to lunch in the witch's kitchen, so maybe there was a special relationship, it's quite possible. I'm still on very good terms

with him and when he was here—he was a visiting professor once—we saw a lot of each other. I remember, we were once thrown out together from a little restaurant here. We were used to sitting in the European fashion somewhere over a cup of tea or coffee and arguing and talking, talking, talking. You don't do that in the U.S., so somebody came and said, "I'm sorry but we need this table." [laughter] So it may well be that he at that time was interested to hear what I was telling him about Vienna—who was there, how the conditions were, and so on. Through his wife, who is a musician, he had connections to that circle around Käthe Breuer, whose house I lived in for awhile—in this case not in the attic but in the basement.

SMITH: What about John Summerson. Did you meet him?

SEKLER: Yes, when I worked on Wren. He was fairly reserved, but helpful, especially after he had overcome his first suspicion that I would just be wasting his time asking about things I ought to know. I guess as a special sign of appreciation, after the Wren book had appeared and was quite well reviewed and he found things there that he hadn't written about when he wrote about Wren, he invited me for lunch at the Athenaeum, which was like getting a decoration.

[laughter] That was quite an experience. The tables had no tablecloths—they were massive wood things—and the men's room [was designed] by Michael Faraday—the ventilation or something like that. Summerson pointed out to me

Bishop so-and-so sitting there—things like that. Really, it was like out of a story. I'm sure all this has changed today, but at that time this was still Ye Olde Britain. I also got to see [Anthony] Blunt occasionally—Wittkower introduced me—but I didn't see him much. I didn't take any liking to him.

SMITH: As an architectural historian would you have much to talk about with somebody like Blunt?

SEKLER: He knew a lot about French art and architecture, but I didn't have much to do with him.

SMITH: I hear different stories about the relationship of the émigrés to British society. I wonder what your observations were and your own experiences.

SEKLER: It was quite clear from the way they all talked and behaved that they felt very much a separate island in there. They still did have official problems occasionally. These were two worlds: the Courtauld, with Margaret Whinney and Blunt, and the Warburg on the other side. Then with Pevsner, slowly, a breakthrough occurred, and finally the Warburg was really recognized for its worth. I don't know what the administrative arrangements were, but I had the feeling that at times there was a danger that the Warburg might be just absorbed into the British system without keeping its originality and its own character. They were very glad when that was finally settled. They had the feeling that the British colleagues were suspicious of their newfangled ideas. This cleared up as

time went by, of course. At that time there weren't many English scholars in the Warburg, but now there's nobody left of the old group there. So it has been assimilated without losing its own character, I guess.

SMITH: But some people, like Pevsner or Gombrich, and maybe Wittkower to a certain degree, had greater ease moving between the two worlds?

SEKLER: Certainly Wittkower had no problem, as far as I could see, but Gombrich I don't know, because as I said, our contacts were informal, whereas with Wittkower I saw him much more often and knew more about what he was doing, and he was discussing things with me.

SMITH: What about yourself. Did you feel free to mingle with British people, British society? You of course weren't going to live there permanently.

SEKLER: That's right, yes. I must say that on the whole people were very decent. All the way to that anonymous housewife in the grocery shop, let's say, who would make a gift of some of those food stamps to me because she had many more, having a big family, and she saw that I only got these little quantities of stuff. I never felt discriminated against in any way. I was talking to my wife yesterday—of course we were talking about what we have been doing here—and it became clear to me that those English years were very happy ones, in retrospect.

SMITH: We haven't talked about your fellow students. How did the student

population work together, or did they?

SEKLER: Well, there were practically no fellow students at the Warburg at the time. There were one or two women, I think American, who were working on projects with somebody from the Warburg supervising them. We had very nice contacts, being of course the youngest in this whole group there, and there was always a kind of teatime at the institute, so people would gather there and we would chat and joke, but they were not working in architectural history. Of course it was nice to have them around, but we didn't have, shall we say, long discussions, as graduate students do here, about method or about teachers; that didn't occur.

SMITH: So your community of scholars, then, was really the teachers, the fellows?

SEKLER: Yes. There was one fellow student, who was not at the Warburg—we probably met at the AA—and that was Joseph Rykwert. We would see each other occasionally, and we would mostly talk about modern architecture, not about scholarly topics.

SMITH: He was also a Le Corbusier advocate.

SEKLER: Oh, absolutely. We were of one mind there. There were a few other people I knew from the Architectural Association, among them Stefan Buzas, but Joseph I remember well, and I think he remembers it too. We would go for

walks together and go to parties together.

SMITH: But at that time he was already, if I recall correctly, interested less in solving questions of housing than in dealing with public space—or ritual space.

SEKLER: Yes, with churches. He was a very lively and enthusiastic chap. Some of this still comes through now.

SMITH: Did you have a role in connecting him to Wittkower, that you know of? I think he actually studied with Wittkower a little bit later than you.

SEKLER: No, I don't think so; that happened in some other way.

SMITH: I know from the other interviews that we've done that those people who would use the word "modern" to describe themselves and their interests, whether their field was the modern or not, tended to have a strong interest also in the High Renaissance, and I'm wondering if there's a logical connection that you saw there.

SEKLER: Well, at that time Geoffrey Scott's book, *The Architecture of Humanism*[: *A Study in the History of Taste*], was still very influential in England. I forget when it came out, but it was still widely read by young architects. And we already talked yesterday about the subject of proportion; there were big debates at that time about that.

SMITH: At the same time you also had a Vienna life that we've talked about a little bit in terms of your practice, but you were also teaching at the Vienna

Technical University.

SEKLER: Yes. I was on leave of absence. I was at that time *Assistent*, as it was called, and eventually I became a *Dozent*, which means I acquired the *venia legendi*, which is something that doesn't exist in the English-speaking countries, only in central Europe. After you have a doctorate, you are supposed to wait something like six years—you have to have some publications in the meantime, or other works of note—and then you have to present one work that is different from your dissertation, not the same topic, and that is the *Habilitationsschrift*. If that is accepted, and there is an oral exam that goes with it, eventually you get this document that entitles you to hold academic lectures in a certain area that is stipulated. I guess it has somewhat the same purpose as the Ph.D. has in this country. It's your entry card, but it's more important, because in German-speaking countries all universities are run by the state, and this document, which comes from the ministry, shows that you are now certified by the state as an academic teacher. When a new vacancy comes in your field, the law decrees that people who have this *venia legendi* theoretically should be given the first choice, or should at least be considered. So it was an important step to get that.

I was an *Assistent* for quite a while, because the *Dozentur* doesn't get paid—it is only an honor—whereas an *Assistent* gets paid. So I held my own lectures and seminars on this topic of architectural theory and design theory and

criticism. These lectures were a completely optional thing. They were not mandatory to get a degree, but they were very well received by the students because, as I said, I brought news that they wouldn't get elsewhere for a while.

SMITH: This was in the architecture school?

SEKLER: In the architecture school, yes.

SMITH: Not in art history.

SEKLER: No. In art history I was invited by Swoboda to come over and give a lecture occasionally, but of course that would be a different kind of lecture from those I was teaching at the Technik, where there were also studio exercises about basic design. There was much Bauhaus influence there. At that time, in fact, on my reading list you would find Kandinsky and Klee, and nobody else was doing that, so for the students this was exciting, and some of the people who went there at that time still remember it. One of them is a professor, who is actually retiring now in Vienna, Hans Puchhammer; he was in that group.

SMITH: Now your class was architectural theory and design theory?

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: Were they historically oriented or topically oriented?

SEKLER: They were, shall we say, morphologically oriented, clearly inspired by Klee: *Punkt, Linie, Fläche*. I began with point, line, and surface, but of course I used a lot of historic material in making these points.

SMITH: But it was not necessarily arranged chronologically?

SEKLER: Not chronologically, not at all. Historic lectures I only gave on occasions when I had to substitute for Professor Engelhart, who was still the head. He was already sick and at times couldn't teach, so then I taught the history classes.

SMITH: One hears an awful lot, and in fact our interview series seems to confirm this, of the tremendous distance that exists, at least in Germany, between the faculty and the students.

SEKLER: This would be in Austria too. Now it's getting better, definitely getting much better, but at that time, yes. A professor was the king on top of the pyramid and then further down somewhere came the assistants, and then there was nothing for a long time, and then somewhere way down there were the students. [laughter]

SMITH: How much personal interaction did you have with your students?

SEKLER: First of all, in my seminar, in these little studio exercises, it was a very strong personal interaction, because it was not a big group. I knew everybody and of course this was going on after I had already been to this country once and had observed how things were done here. I also had observed how teaching was done at the Architectural Association in London, which was also a studio type of teaching with close interaction between students and

professors, so I brought that in. Then, as an *Assistent* you had much more interaction because you were really the one, on the whole, who dealt with the students. You were there much more than the professor. You gave the first corrections of the schemes, or whatever it was, and only after you had decided it was good enough for the professor to see you would tell the students, "Okay, now you can go and see the professor." He might accept it at that moment or he might still not be happy with something, then you had again to make sure the student understood this and did the right thing, until it was finally ready to be handed in to get a mark. So, certainly, yes, I knew the students quite well, and there are still people around in Vienna whom I meet occasionally at some opening or some architects' association meeting, who remember when I was an *Assistent*, telling them this or that.

SMITH: Were you on a first-name basis with the students?

SEKLER: No. It was Herr so-and-so. I think even today that's the case. They might call somebody by his family name without saying "Herr." But I was giving this little block of lectures in Vienna last fall, and I had to examine these people afterwards, and I remember, when I called them in, it was Herr so-and-so, or Fräulein so-and-so.

SMITH: Can you give an example of a kind of exercise that you were giving at that time and how it related to your concept of design theory?

SEKLER: I can remember one which was rather toward the end of the term. It was a difficult exercise, but it produced a few beautiful projects. I asked the students to design a monument or a memorial for something. It was really an exercise in the invention of abstract form. I remember one or two projects that were very successful, very beautiful. One was a sort of elegant vertical form that was modeled almost like an airplane propeller. People had good ideas, and this exercise followed my lectures on the interaction of space and form. Those lectures were organized by progressively going from point, line, plane, to volume, space, tectonics, and the interaction finally of all those elements. I talked about proportion, color, texture—all the elements that the artist uses to get an effect, but in this case, the architect was using these things.

SMITH: What kind of examples did you give the students?

SEKLER: Oh, this was very broadly conceived. Of course I used baroque examples. I did go far afield taking my own photographs and slides for all this, and of course I used that material later at Harvard. For textures I showed them medieval walls, vernacular architecture, wood houses, block buildings. There were plenty of examples still around in Austria at that time of old wooden walls or shingled roofs. I also showed them the work of contemporaries: the use of color by somebody like Breuer, or Le Corbusier. For tectonics I showed them Mies van der Rohe.

SMITH: Did you show them the Liebknecht memorial?

SEKLER: I'm not sure, but I did use examples like that, or the Gropius [Denkmal der] Märzgefallenen. At that time, still, that kind of material you didn't find easily. Now we are absolutely swamped by all these glorious publications, and slides are being sold at every corner, but I still had to work a lot with the big old-fashioned black-and-white glass slides. The small ones had only just been introduced. You know, they were a novelty at the time. Color slides were a novelty and expensive. I wish I had taken more slides in the fifties, but they were so expensive, I only took a few. Of course I also took examples from antiquity. By that time I had traveled around and seen some of those things. I always took the telling photograph.

SMITH: So you would rely on your own photography?

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: Is that something that you recommend to your students?

SEKLER: Yes.

[Tape III, Side Two]

SEKLER: When you go personally to look at architecture, it looks so different. Also, eventually, you become much more aware, and you find you can only talk about architecture if you have really been there and gone through it and around it, but not if you just saw it in the latest glossy.

SMITH: It strikes me that one of the conventions for architectural photography is not to show people or uses. How do you feel about that?

SEKLER: It is a problem that the really stunning photographs are taken without people. I have eventually tried to get some human scale in, in other words, to shoot it at the moment when someone is walking by. As an aside, when I was recently in Santa Monica, I was invited for dinner at a friend's house together with the photographer [Julius] Shulman.

SMITH: Oh, yes.

SEKLER: He's a wonderful character. He must be quite old by now, but he was full of stories about Soriano, about [R. M.] Schindler, [Richard] Neutra, and I enjoyed it enormously.

SMITH: I think Neutra found him when he was sixteen, and he basically trained Shulman to photograph his work.

SEKLER: Yes, Shulman did almost all of the photography for Neutra's work. He knows a lot that would be worth recording.

SMITH: He has been interviewed by the Archives of American Art, so his story has been preserved. What was the work that you wrote to *habilitieren* yourself?

SEKLER: It was called *Das Punkthaus im europäischen Wohnungsbau* [1952]—Point Houses in European Housing.

SMITH: I'm not quite sure what a point house is. Does it have a tower, like in

those photos you showed me?

SEKLER: It may be a tower, but it doesn't have to be a tower. These are *Punkthaus* plans. [shows photos] It was a form that was used in Scandinavia a lot. The most important feature is that you have a centralized staircase and elevator group always in the middle. It is a very economical solution, because from this central point of vertical communication, you can reach six or even more apartments; they are all accessible from one landing or from one elevator. I have examples of *Punkthäuser* from Hungary, France, Sweden. [shows photos] This one even has eight apartments, but I don't think that it was actually built; it's just called "project." So this was a very technical study, actually, simply analyzing these and trying to arrive at a quantification, a coefficient: the relationship between usable habitable space and traffic space. Of course the more usable space you can get with the least traffic space, the more economical your building is. You consider also the relation of area to outside circumference, because of heating. The ideal is where you have a minimum of circumference with a maximum of surface. So you analyze such plans and try to arrive at some conclusions.

I had actually suggested other topics that were closer to my heart, but I was advised by Holey to take this because he said, "We'll get this through." This being a technical university, you know, a lot of the professors were

suspicious of theory, and there were of course some of the old Nazis still around who had returned to the *Hochschule*, so it was also diplomatic maneuvering. This turned out to be a topic that was acceptable, and the readers of it were professors who were well disposed. The obvious thing for me was to submit a German version of Wren, but that had to go through Ginhart, the old Nazi art historian, who had returned. Well, he just never read it. So after a year or so we decided we have to do something about this, or this will be endless, so I switched the topic and next thing you know I was *habilitiert*.

SMITH: How was architectural practice affected by the occupation, which didn't end until '55?

SEKLER: Certainly one effect was that less investment was done in the Russian occupied zones than in the others. More news about modern architecture came in from the U.S. You could find *The American House* in the library, then there was the U.S. Information Service. There was the British Council in the British sector. The French brought people like Le Corbusier to Vienna; they were very active in the cultural sector. There were continuous lectures and exhibitions. So those were actually wonderful stimuli; they brought things in that we wouldn't have known about otherwise. I might have known about it because I had been outside, but most people didn't know what was going on elsewhere, in architecture. What the Russians brought in nobody wanted to know about. I

remember a very heated debate where they were trying to convince us that it was fine to build Russian- style apartment houses with all this stucco decoration, you know, this sort of socialist realism type of architecture. There was at that time a town councillor in Vienna, Dr. Viktor Matejka, though maybe here my memory slips. It wasn't Matejka, it was Ernst Fischer. At any rate, one member of the Austrian Communist Party was in cultural affairs, and he was a very intelligent man, I mean, not a fool at all. And Matejka, I must add, after the Russian occupation of Hungary, left the Communist Party in protest; he was a very decent man. But with Fischer I remember having this big debate, and I was of course talking for modern architecture. He was trying to explain, which of course now would be popular again, he said, "But the people want it. For them this is a sign that they have arrived. This is what the rich people had before and now everybody can have it." But I was arguing against it, that it was fake—easy arguments—and we didn't resolve anything. I happened to remember that debate.

SMITH: What was *Annus mirabilis*[: *Zeitgemässe Gedanken zu einer Wiederaufbauplanung der Vergangenheit* (1951)] ?

SEKLER: *Annus mirabilis* was very much a discussion of the town planning of London after the Great Fire.

SMITH: Oh, so it was part of your Wren research.

SEKLER: Yes, which was enlarged in some directions. It was of interest to the

people of that time because there was the analogy between the ruins after the Great Fire and the ruins in Vienna after the bombardment and the fires.

SMITH: How much of the city was destroyed?

SEKLER: Some 40 percent was damaged or destroyed. It's very hard to remember that because when you are there today there are no traces. Except if you look very hard in some places you can still see on the stone walls these pockmarks from the shell splinters or bullets. You have seen photographs from Germany, probably—big heaps of debris, and ruins everywhere. The simple cleaning up and then the rebuilding took years. But typically, for Vienna—what I always tell the students here—the first thing they wanted to rebuild was the opera and the Burgtheater, and nobody objected to that—the people were all for it. Nobody said, "This is crazy. Build housing. Repair the hospitals. Build more useful things." No, it was the opera they wanted. [laughter]

That reminds me that there was one man in Vienna at that time who had not been at the Technical University earlier, when I was a student, but was only appointed after the end of the war. I admired him, we became great friends, and he tried to help me on many occasions. His name was Boltenstern, which is a Swedish name. Long after he had retired I would still visit him, and on one occasion he had on the wall something he had never shown me before, a patent of nobility of the Swedish family of the Boltenstjörna. He never used this title when

he was an active architect. At any rate, he was the one who rebuilt the opera. He was a very sensitive architect and a wonderful gentleman. He did some very good work, and I learned from him—again, not directly studying with him or anything like that, but just from his behavior and from looking at his work and the way he proceeded.

SMITH: I wanted to ask you how you placed your knowledge of the big, general intellectual currents at the time.

SEKLER: You mean in the fifties?

SMITH: In the fifties. For example, one of the things that Vienna is famous for is logical positivism, and there's a recent very interesting article by Peter Galison about the influence of logical positivism on the Bauhaus. So I'm wondering to what degree logical positivism was still a living force.

SEKLER: I should read that. My first contact with anything related to logical positivism was when I had to deal with the Wittgenstein House.

SMITH: Oh, of course, yes.

SEKLER: But I must confess that before that I didn't have a clue. The Wittgenstein House was, I guess, in the sixties, and that did encourage me to read the *Tractatus [Logico-Philosophicus]* and I talked to other people about it. Then of course here at Harvard, at our *Stammtisch* that I explained to you yesterday, now the most senior member is [W. V.] Quine. So by osmosis, and

asking him from time to time, I have learned a little more. He told me about his visit to Vienna. He was there I think in 1930, or 1932, precisely because he wanted to meet these people, and he then followed [Rudolf] Carnap to Prague. So he has told me some stories of life in Vienna at that time. But when I was a student or a young *Assistent* or *Dozent*, unfortunately, I had no knowledge of logical positivism. But I was one of the few students in a course that was given at the Technical University, called "Methodik der Wissenschaftlichen Arbeit." An old gentleman was teaching it, and he was very pleased to have two students at least—occasionally we were three—but I don't recall that he introduced logical positivism to us.

SMITH: What about psychoanalysis?

SEKLER: That you couldn't escape. In fact, a friend of one of my then best friends was a Greek psychoanalyst, Spanudis, who later went to South America and, sadly, committed suicide. Psychoanalysis would be discussed in parties. I can't say that any salons existed anymore at that time, but people did talk about such matters.

SMITH: Did you have enough personal interest to read some of the texts yourself?

SEKLER: Yes, but later. In my library in Vienna I have a few things which must be fairly rare by now because I picked them up at secondhand bookstores,

like a first edition of *Totem und Tabu* and a few other things which I read with interest, but I cannot say that I steeped myself in this. Also, in the Vienna intellectual circles where I had contacts, there was a bit of skepticism about the whole thing. They didn't take it as seriously as I found people took it in England, or in this country. There was much more talk about straight psychiatry— the famous [Julius] Wagner-Jauregg in Vienna, and then later somebody like Frankl.

Walter Toman was a psychologist for whom I designed a little house. It was a small house, but they like it and still use it. Toman is a psychotherapist, and his magnum opus that has become quite famous and has impressed me, is called *Family Constellations*. It deals with observable consequences of somebody's position in a family constellation, whether you are an only child, whether you are an older brother or younger brother, whether you have a younger sister or an older sister, or whether you are in the middle of three. You can see there are a number of constellations possible, and he found out, and I think statistically he could prove this, that this does have a definite impact on your marital behavior, which makes a lot of common sense. If an older brother marries a younger sister it's an ideal constellation because he's used to protecting younger siblings, taking care of them, and she's used to being handled as the youngest member of a sibling group. The most difficult ones I remember he

found of course were the only children, because they were not used to being in a group.

So of course with him I talked about psychoanalysis, it's true, but again he didn't get very deeply into that, and also Spanudis didn't enlighten me really very much, so I guess I have remained really very marginal in this respect. I am aware of the tremendous importance of psychoanalysis, no doubt about it, but then, I read some of the psychoanalytic interpretations of works of art that for the art historian really were pretty unacceptable, pretty nonsensical, and this didn't help my relationship to psychoanalysis. But certainly it has become part of my intellectual luggage. There was an awareness of what to watch out for, you know—things are not as simple as they appear.

SMITH: What about existentialism?

SEKLER: Existentialism, yes, for a while. Of course the French occupation forces brought [Jean-Paul] Sartre to Vienna. It's odd that I, and I think several others, came to it from Sartre rather than from [Martin] Heidegger.

SMITH: Of course Sartre was a student of Heidegger.

SEKLER: Yes, that's what I mean; it should be the other way around. But I did hear some philosophy at the university, you know; you could just go in and sit in there. I remember Friedrich Kainz; he lectured mostly about aesthetics. I don't know how much Heidegger was at that time debated in Vienna philosophical

circles. I certainly only found out about him later. But among my artist friends in Vienna, existentialism was very important at that time and I tried to understand it also and relate it to what happened in the arts. Not in architecture; architecture really is a more down-to-earth kind of technical branch of the arts. But I was always trying to understand and be involved with what was the cutting edge in the visual arts also. I found that my artist friends were much concerned with existentialism, and that it certainly colored their attitudes to their own work to some degree.

SMITH: To what degree can a philosophical system affect design principles in the twentieth century?

SEKLER: I think there are several ways. One is indirectly—how philosophy affects the whole climate of discourse at a given moment in a culture—or in certain circles, to make it less general. For example, what would be the *dernier cri* of Viennese intellectuals? Of course architects would hear it too and try maybe to get involved, but very often this was really on a very general level only.

On the whole, the phenomenon of architects trying directly to be in touch with the most recent philosophical developments came to the fore much later. I am of the opinion that in most cases the architects did not understand at all what this was really all about. They did not have the time and the training to read the

very complicated manifestos of professional philosophers, so their knowledge came from a sort of paperback acquaintance.

SMITH: Are you talking about deconstruction?

SEKLER: Oh, and before that. Certainly this is true about deconstruction. I am sure that most architects don't understand really what [Jacques] Derrida is all about, or [Jean] Baudrillard or [Jean-François] Lyotard. But they know this is "in" now, so they will try to read some of it. Even if they don't read it they get it secondhand because the architectural periodicals write about it.

SMITH: The idea of the building as a text?

SEKLER: Yes, of course—one issue you may have gathered I am not sympathetic with. I think it's a facile analogy. Analogy can be useful, I mean, we all use it occasionally, but if you really take it seriously and try to deal with architecture just like that, I think it's the wrong path.

SMITH: What about urbanistics, where there have been analyses of the way people use urban environment as narratives?

SEKLER: Well, you could admit it there; since that is a sequential experience you could describe it as a narrative. That's where conceptual maps come in, you know, and Kevin Lynch is the best representative of that. I think that that is legitimate. It has given some good results, but the individual building has to be experienced as a three-dimensional totality through which you move. You

experience it as a totality first, before you start moving through it and maybe scanning it in a linear fashion. The text happens to have to be linear. It has to go from point to point to point, but that is not how you experience architecture. If you enter a cathedral, it's a total experience; that's the essential thing. If you then make up narratives about it, that's fine; that's another story. You can then analyze and criticize and interpret these narratives, but they are not the experience of the cathedral.

SMITH: Getting back to the fifties and sixties. Another major trend, particularly in Europe amongst intellectuals, was what we could call humanistic Marxism or anti-Stalinist Marxism. To what degree were you exposed to that?

SEKLER: Viennese housing, for the most part, was built by the Viennese municipal government, which, since the foundation of the first republic, with short interruptions—Austro-fascism and Nazism—was solidly social democrat, which is that kind of Marxism—the belief in social justice, the betterment of the environment, and so on. So that was the prevailing atmosphere, there's no doubt about it.

SMITH: Were there equivalents to people like Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson in England—the search for a cultural Marxism? Reyner Banham was certainly influenced by the Thompson-Williams kind of approach.

SEKLER: No single powerful name comes to mind. Clearly there were

institutes or institutions that organized symposia and lecture series and debates where you would get that sort of thing, but I wasn't very involved so I cannot tell you who the people were. At that time I knew it, but not now. But it was in the air; it was the one big direction. The other big direction of course was more the Catholic right-wing *Volkspartei*. Of course they also were for social justice and a humanistic approach, they just disagreed violently about the way to implement it, and about some of the ideological foundations. But fundamentally, in practice, very often they tried to achieve the same things, only by different means: to get housing, to get better schools, to get a lot of culture, to get social services.

SMITH: I have not seen the essay "On the Spiritual in Architecture," but it appears to be quite important in your earlier work. When you talk about "the spiritual core in architecture," I wonder what you mean by that. Do you mean religion, for instance, as Joseph Rykwert clearly means, or is there something else?

SEKLER: At the outset it was religion or a belief system, in that article, and clearly you have the Wittkower influence there. As a beginner you have the courage to broach gigantic topics because you are quite innocent of realizing what you are doing. I was simply pointing out that at all times, until the seventeenth century, there was a belief system, which very directly, through precepts about proportion systems and about symbolic forms, affected architecture. Of course

you can show it in Egypt with the pyramids and what we know about the beliefs and the geometry linked to them.

In Greek architecture, Max Theuer, whom I've mentioned so often, had written a study, not well known but very interesting, on the Greek Doric peripteral temple. He investigated the dimensions and the proportions very carefully, and he then suggested, also very carefully because he was a good scholar, that it might not be a coincidence that in temples you have the Platonic system of ideal numbers, the building stones of the cosmos, where the second and third power of a number plays a role. You know about Pythagoreanism—the number element of all things. So, lo and behold, in the Parthenon you have the four-to-nine ratio. It's hard to assume this was a sheer coincidence or done for practical purposes. Then comes Christianity; volumes have been filled about that. Günther Bandmann was one of the first to write about it in his *Mittelalterliche Architektur als Bedeutungsträger*. Naturally it's the Christian symbolism: the cross, the trinity, the triangle. Then there are examples from the Renaissance, and it still lives on into the baroque—churches built on equilateral triangles representing the trinity. Then comes the great moment of change, and that was my discovery.

Working on the Wren book, I found what to me were shattering statements by [Claude] Perrault that proportions were not invariable, like the

harmonies in music. They were just invented by the architects, one imitating the other, something along those lines. There you have the voice of the Enlightenment. There was a new way of thinking about things—pure rationalism. Perrault had already done a study where he compared the different orders and pointed out there was no immutable rule about those things, that there were big variations there. So the whole Vitruvian system was really demolished at that moment. I am proud of having mentioned that briefly in my Wren book, long before all the others came and discovered the same things.

Rykwert's *The First Moderns* was fundamentally an elaboration of that thought, that insight, which is correct; he is perfectly right in what he says in *The First Moderns*; this was the break-off point. After that, architects could no longer have this wonderful security of feeling they were embedded in a bigger system because their buildings were in harmony with the bigger harmony of the cosmos, according to their belief system. Wren still wrote about God as the greatest geometer, and the *harmonia mundi*—Kepler's thinking. When this is broken down, you can't think that the proportions of your building are going up more or less automatically, centered into that harmony. How you arrive at a conviction now becomes very personal and idiosyncratic. More recently, however, if you take the spiritual in the broadest possible sense, not linking it to any specific belief system, or a religion, but to the spiritual experience the human

being can have outside the belief system also, then the question is, What can architecture contribute to having such a spiritual experience?

I now have one doctoral candidate who I hope will finish within a year, and he's the last one I am still trying to see through. He has worked for a number of years. His topic was his volition; I didn't set him on this track. I rather reluctantly accepted him because I said, "Look, this is a very, very difficult topic. It is not like taking a clear cut well-defined thing and you do all the research in depth and then you have your dissertation." But he himself was motivated, and said he wanted to find where was the spiritual in our architecture. Is it still possible to have it and how does it occur? So that is what he is working on, more or less. He just gave a paper at the College Art Association, and he called it, "Disclosing the Sacred Dimension in Religious and Secular Architecture Through Devices that Induce the Transcendence of Finiteness."

SMITH: What's his name?

SEKLER: Heinrich Hermann. He says his paper was received with much interest. His disciplinary minor was at the school of religion. He has also had a lot of commerce with the psychologists and the philosophers, like Hilary Putnam, for example. He went to Hilary's lectures and to the lectures of this wonderful old gentleman, Israel Scheffler, who taught a course called "Varieties of Religious Experience."

SMITH: Oh, yes. In philosophy.

SEKLER: In philosophy, yes. I have sort of broadened the question from what it was in the fifties or sixties.

SMITH: But what you seem to be talking about now is a sort of immanent spirituality that never quite congeals.

SEKLER: I think it's a part of the make-up of the human person, that personality that is capable of having that kind of experience, just as you are capable of having an aesthetic experience, and the two can be related.

SMITH: So is it the need for a grand narrative in which you can place your own personal intuitions?

SEKLER: Not necessarily, because that would again fizzle. Once you recognize it as a grand narrative it isn't going to move you anymore. But flying past Mt. Everest, pretty close, can move you to tears, and you don't need any grand narrative to account for it; it's a real experience. And there are other experiences like that, and they vary for different people.

SMITH: And architecture could be one of those triggers?

SEKLER: That's what I would hope. I can't prove it, but it could be, I think. You see, I am profoundly convinced you cannot reduce everything to a grand or small narrative; that gets rid of the directness of experience. It's only people who deal chiefly in words and concepts who think the world is like that. If you

deal with artists a lot, as I have during my life, you realize that often they don't live in a world of words; they live in another world, of forms and colors and spaces. They cannot account for it in words, nor do they wish to.

SMITH: Psychologists divide people into those who have what they call eidetic memories, where they can see images, and haptic memories, where they are not really images but more emotional states. Do you have an eidetic memory?

SEKLER: I would say yes, occasionally. I wouldn't say continuously. For example, yesterday when we were talking about Geoffrey Webb, I suddenly very clearly saw his face and figure, which I hadn't seen for a long, long time.

[Tape IV, Side One]

SMITH: In 1953 you got a Fulbright fellowship. What were the goals of your trip to the U.S.?

SEKLER: Well, as I told you, I had originally wanted to study under Gropius, or work with him, so the idea of coming to the States was already, in a way, born in England, because people were all talking about Mies and Wright and Gropius. Also, the American Information Service in Vienna certainly was extremely successful in creating this image of a tremendous cultural avant-garde in this country. I'm sure I was one of many Europeans who was eager to see or experience this ideal, which never existed. I wrote about that in relation to Loos and Hoffmann. But even an America that never was had a tremendous impact

and could also be used as a tool back home—"They do it much better this way." So I would say every young architect of my age at that time wanted to go to the States, or they wanted to work with Le Corbusier. I am exaggerating a little, but it was pretty much like that. I had seen a good deal in Europe, in England, and in France. I went to Scandinavia, of course I went to Italy, and I was very, very eager to see what was really happening in this country, in architecture.

When I wasn't in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I did my pilgrimages, as I mentioned before. I went to visit Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, [Erich] Mendelsohn in California, Wright again in Taliesin, and I went to look at all the skyscrapers. New York, was an absolutely overwhelming experience when you arrived there from Europe—a completely different kind of architecture. So certainly there was a tremendous impact.

SMITH: And your home base was at Harvard?

SEKLER: Yes. I was a research fellow in the Fine Arts Department, at the Fogg [Art Museum] where at that time John Coolidge was director. He was extremely kind and helpful, he found a little office for me there, and I made friends with many people and felt very much at home. It seems to me I was still making drawings for the Wren book there. That must have come out in '56, so I was just drawing some of those plans and elevations up there in that little room, and Harry Bober was there. He was acting chairman for a while, in fact, which

also helped very much. Then of course I spent a lot of time across the road, in the school of architecture, which was just going into a new phase, with a new dean, [Josep Lluís] Sert. Serge Chermayeff was there, a leading figure, and Walter Bogner. Those were all people with whom I became friends. They took an interest in me, and they were strong personalities, in a way. Of course Sert I had known before, through CIAM; he was by that time president of CIAM.

SMITH: Did he know you through CIAM?

SEKLER: Yes. One thing led to another, and they asked me to give a lecture at the School of Design, and I think it was the one about the spiritual in architecture, a lecture which I gave in several other places too, when I traveled through the country. People recommended me as a lecturer, or I suggested it, because as a Fulbright scholar at that time you had very little money and so every little bit helped. That was a time when the fees were still very modest for a lecture, very modest. But I enjoyed myself, and apparently this lecture went down very well; it was just in the air at that time and people were interested in this topic. It dealt with proportion, which was something Sert was very interested in personally. He proportioned his buildings very carefully, sort of along the lines of the *Modulor* of Le Corbusier.

As a consequence of that lecture I was invited to come back as a visiting professor. I didn't know that at that time. I had absolutely no idea of the

academic workings here. I had also visited Kenneth [J.] Conant. I knew his book and he was an extremely happy man at that time and explained to me that he was just retiring and had no idea that they were actually trying to reorganize history teaching at the School of Architecture. But I was invited for the next academic year, 1955. I guess I was here from '53 to '54, and then there was an interval in between because I began teaching as a visiting professor in '55.

SMITH: So you had spent a term here or the full academic year?

SEKLER: I think I spent a term here only.

SMITH: So you alternated for a while between Vienna and Cambridge?

SEKLER: I think so, yes. At any rate, this was of course a great thing for me to be invited as a visiting professor from Vienna. Then the fun part of it was that the other person who was teaching history was Giedion, from Zürich. He was working on his book, *The Eternal Present*[: *A Contribution on Constancy and Change*] at that time; and really, all he was interested in was to teach the Egyptian part or Mesopotamia. But he also gave lectures on the material in *Space, Time and Architecture*, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture.

To make a long story short, one thing led to another, and Giedion came less and less frequently, because I guess he was getting older and also he wanted to finish his books. So more and more fell to me, and eventually they asked me to stay on. I had no idea that there had been a lot of quite distinguished local

architectural historians who had hoped to become the successors of Kenneth Conant and were deeply disappointed that I suddenly appeared here. And frankly, I had no intention of staying, but then of course the atmosphere of Harvard captivated me and it was clear that to work here was about 200 percent easier and better than in Vienna, where I had observed these sort of eternal assistants, you know, people who had stayed on there, which I could have done at that time, in the hope of eventually becoming a professor. They had slowly curved their back more and more, leaving the room backward, facing the professor. I remember that I felt very strongly I didn't want to end my life like that. So I ended up here.

SMITH: You had to adapt to a very different educational system.

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: How did you start reconceptualizing the material that you taught?

SEKLER: I was helped by my complete innocence. I didn't know how people did things, how people carefully managed their careers here, the teaching loads and all that. I was completely innocent; I didn't know anything about that. I was just very enthusiastic and very happy, you know? I loved the atmosphere in the School of Design under Sert. Everybody who lived through those years, the mid-fifties, when they come back, have the same memory. It was a golden age, because students and faculty were very much fired by the same enthusiasm.

Again, as in England before, we were going to build the New Jerusalem. Finally modern architecture had had a breakthrough. Finally there was going to be a new kind of society, in which architecture would help to make the ideal environment. It sounds terribly naive now but at that time this gave us a fantastic impetus.

SMITH: Can I ask you what were the material manifestations that allowed you to believe that this was happening?

SEKLER: At this time, urban renewal was the catchword. Urban design was almost invented here at Harvard with all the urban design conferences. It seemed like finally one would be able to do something about the city, about its degeneration. Again, in hindsight it's easy to see that this wasn't going to work in the way we had expected it. But at that time a lot of people were convinced it would work. After all, a number of good things were done. There was something in the air that seemed very promising, and the people who were in the school at that time have gone out and become great figures in the world. From the students of that time, some became deans at other schools, one is at Washington University in St. Louis; one, Roger Montgomery, is still the dean at Berkeley, in the architecture department; Chiko [Fumihiko] Maki, who recently got the gold medal of the UIA, was professor of architecture at Tokyo University; Dolf Schnebli, who for a long time was the dean and the leading

design professor at ETH in Zürich, is just retiring now. So the people who went out from the school at that time took something with them, there is no doubt. Of course the school also obviously took many talented people as students.

It was also a wonderful atmosphere regarding student-faculty interaction. That was the time when we knew all students by their first names, and it was like a big family. My becoming integrated here probably worked only because Sert was the most unacademic person himself. He didn't have a clue about how the university worked administratively, but he was a strong personality, a fine artist, and he fortunately had the backing of the president, of [Nathan] Pusey. Pusey had never experienced anything like a Sert, you know, like a European-artist type who comes from Paris, whose uncle had been a great painter in Paris, who knew Picasso and was a personal friend of Miró. It was, in a way, Pusey's volition to turn the university around, as far as the arts were concerned, that led to this revival of the arts at Harvard, and eventually to the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. So that was a great enterprise, and that's what really captivated me.

With the energy of youth I was teaching like crazy. I looked up some notes from that time and on one occasion I was teaching in the same term two history courses and a seminar, and I was up every night till midnight preparing just for the next day. Fortunately, it soon became a more regular routine. But you see this was because Giedion and myself were asked by Sert to reform the

history teaching in the School of Design, which had completely dwindled under Gropius. Of course Giedion had this tremendous weight and authority; he was at the height of his fame at that time. There were no required history courses. People were encouraged to take them at the Fogg, with Kenneth Conant.

SMITH: Conant was in the Fine Arts Department wasn't he?

SEKLER: No, he was in the architecture department, but he was teaching in the Fine Arts Department. And he was another generation; the modern movement didn't mean to him what it meant to us. Otherwise, in the Fine Arts Department there was nobody who was interested in that sort of thing, except there was Fred[erick] Deknatel in the history of painting. Otherwise you had fine scholars. Sydney Freedberg was there, but he was in Renaissance and mannerism. He rather despised anything modern, though he was extremely nice to me personally, and very helpful. In fact, he gave me shrewd advice in academic matters, because he knew the system. He told me what to do and what to watch out for. Without him I probably would have perished! Of course John Coolidge was a true friend, I must say.

SMITH: And he had a personal interest in the modern.

SEKLER: He did, yes.

SMITH: Though perhaps architecturally his interest was more nineteenth century.

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: Could you tell me a little bit more about the seminars that you ran with Giedion?

SEKLER: Yes. Giedion called it "The Human Scale," and it really dealt with his idiosyncratic predilections in as far as they fitted in with Sert's pedagogical goals. In that year people were dealing with Le Corbusier's *Modulor*, French public squares, which was probably more in this case my inspiration than Giedion's, he wasn't so interested in the urban spaces. He had some interest in it, but it was more the Greek agora that he was interested in, or the Roman forum. Then we had symmetry and proportion, the Washington Square development project in Philadelphia—that must have been me again. There was the Mill Creek development project in St. Louis, perception of the Toronto City Hall competition—that was Christopher Alexander, who came to this seminar. The human scale was just the leitmotif, so the seminars would deal with urban spaces, they would deal a lot with proportion, but they could also deal with the *Endless Column* of Brancusi.

SMITH: The title of the course brings to mind Jane Jacobs.

SEKLER: Yes, but that wasn't there at all. Jane Jacobs was taught in the school, but somebody else, like Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, would deal with such matters. In the next year, you can see where Giedion comes in again when you

look at what was taught: report on Selinus and Olympia; earlier city planning: Tell Hassuna and Tepe Gawra; early city planning examples: Tell el Amarna and Ur; then comes regionalism in Japan; regionalism in Latin America; something about museums; and the relationship of architecture to the plastic arts—that was a key topic. That was or had been of course the great topic of Le Corbusier and CIAM, so there's an echo in there. And then Giedion [stopped teaching] and it became the shaping of urban spaces, this seminar which I did alone and which veered away from this broad approach of Giedion's. I concentrated more on urban spaces and their shaping and their problems. And over the years that also changed and more historic preservation and conservation came into it, and that's where it is now.

SMITH: In terms of your own thinking on this and how you presented it to your students, what was the balance between rationalism and planning on the one hand and the sort of irrational emotional response that you talked about earlier?

SEKLER: To put it very crudely, the irrational component was much contributed by Giedion, who was a master of the innuendo, of not really saying something that would put him clearly on the side of the irrational, but of hinting that there might after all be this connection. He was a master of poetic hypothesis, like in the eternal present. Coming from the practice of architecture, and knowing about these realities, I tended to be more skeptical and rational. I wanted to talk about

what could be proved. Obviously I respected Giedion a great deal, and we didn't argue a lot, but I would put in my caveats at times. Then in my own seminar of course it was very different. I really encouraged fairly rational methods.

SMITH: How did you define "rational methods"? What were the parameters that you stressed as being central to a rational practice of architecture?

SEKLER: Well, I'm thinking now of the urban spaces, particularly—

SMITH: Historic urban spaces?

SEKLER: It could be both historic or present-day; this was open to the students. I welcomed both, and I preferred cross-cultural [studies], which was easy—usually I had students from abroad in the seminar who would bring a new perspective to us. They provided a very valuable component when they presented their projects, which could deal with, say, a Japanese temple precinct, or an ancient Korean royal palace, or a bazaar in Isfahan—things like that. It was very rich and the students loved it. I did too, because you do get insights in this way. I tried to encourage them first of all to learn to describe very carefully what they saw, really to find out what was there, then proceed to analysis, having also captured their intuitive first reaction. Nobody in the seminar was allowed to work on something they hadn't personally experienced. The only exception was if they took an archaeological example where they had only a few fragments left of the site, and in that case they could use a reconstruction; they could use their

imagination there. But again, they had to have been at the site.

SMITH: So they had to take their own photographs?

SEKLER: Yes, and then they had vivid memories of what it was like, how the wind was blowing and how it smelled from this or that. I would give them a checklist of what to look for, what to observe, so they wouldn't overlook something important, like the way the light changed over the course of a day. Then I wanted them to think about the urban context: How does this piece fit into the bigger scheme? Then about the practical parameters: Why is it just here? Why did it take this shape and not another shape? These questions then lead them to historic research. They had to find out as much as they could about that particular space. How did it look a hundred years ago? What were the changes, and why were those changes made? They would go as far as they could with these questions.

They couldn't do as much research as they would do for a book, but they could often find a good deal. They would get the historic iconography, how it was depicted by others, how it was photographed a hundred years ago—the obvious things, but it all begins to add up and it becomes very rich. They realize there's more to it than strikes the eye. Then eventually they could risk an interpretation, but only after they had gone as far as they could in establishing things rationally. There are a lot of things you can establish beyond doubt, and

then comes your narrative, your interpretation. Also, they found out about other people's interpretations of the same subject. Finally, if they wanted to, they could also give an evaluation. They could say this is a great space, or this could have been better if this error hadn't been made. So there you have in a nutshell what I consider a rational approach.

Of course when I do the seminar I remind them or introduce them, if necessary, to various methods of criticism. I use various critical languages that people have used over time, so they are aware that there isn't only one way of talking about these things.

SMITH: And these reports on historic urban spaces were published?

SEKLER: In a modest way, just in-house, but yes, there are these volumes, "Historic Urban Spaces." We also built models to the same scale, which was very revealing, even to Sert. In one seminar we had a New England green, with its church in the middle, and next to it was a model of an agora, with a temple, and then there was a model of the Grand Army Plaza in New York City, all built to the same scale. If you see them side by side, it's extremely revealing. Sert couldn't believe it. He said, "Didn't they make a mistake here? Didn't they change the scale?" because Grand Army Plaza, with the skyscraper there, so dwarfed everything else. On the other hand, you could take the temple from antiquity and exchange it with the New England church on the green, just like

that—they fit perfectly. They were still the same scale. There were other examples like that, and it was always very exciting for everybody to see what would come out of all that.

SMITH: That's interesting, yes.

SEKLER: On one occasion I made an exhibition with some of those presentations and models. As an art historian you get trained in the comparative method; that's how you grow up. Two slides on the screen, two photographs in the book, showing you the early style and the later style. But that hadn't been done with regard to urban spaces before. It had occasionally been done in plans, yes. [Werner] Hegemann did it, and to some degree Sitte, but not with three-dimensional models, to the best of my knowledge.

SMITH: You were also involved with reintroducing architectural history as mandatory after Gropius had abolished it.

SEKLER: Yes, that's right. Giedion and myself sat down and worked this out. We took some time to really do it thoroughly. I was the one who finally formulated it, but certainly Giedion's thoughts went into it. We got Sert and the faculty to change the requirements, and there were four terms of architectural history: antiquity, medieval, Renaissance and baroque, and nineteenth and twentieth century.

SMITH: Were these lecture courses?

SEKLER: Lecture courses, yes, with reports.

SMITH: Did you wind up teaching the sequence?

SEKLER: For a short time I had to do the whole thing. I soon got out of it for obvious reasons, I mean it was impossible; nobody could do something like that alone and do it well. It almost killed me because I was very conscientiously trying to keep up with the literature, you know, not just give textbook lectures. Fortunately, again, I was helped by colleagues at the Fogg. George Hanfmann, the great archaeologist, was there, and he was sort of my father figure. I would go over to George and say, "Look, what's the latest here? I don't think this is topical anymore." He would help me and tell me where to look it up in this or that periodical. I spent a lot of time really studying very hard, and I learned to love the course on antiquity, which I kept teaching for a long time. I taught antiquity and modern. After all, Max Theuer had taught antiquity in Vienna, and he was something of an archaeologist too. He had excavated at Ephesus, so that remained a soft spot for me always. I sometimes wondered whether I wouldn't have enjoyed being an archaeologist, but I think most people probably wonder that at some time. For medieval architecture, Holey of course had been the figure—the surveyor of the cathedral. He taught medieval and I learned a lot from him, and I knew the literature pretty well, and I also love it; I enjoyed that too. So it alternated; in one year, it would be antiquity and medieval, and the

following year it would be Renaissance and modern—Renaissance being taught by Jim [James S.] Ackerman. When Jim Ackerman came, the obvious thing to hand over as soon as I could was the Renaissance course, which I did.

SMITH: Now, these classes were open to the whole university?

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: Where they offered by the architecture school or by fine arts, or jointly?

SEKLER: Jointly. There I have to explain something else, in order for you to understand the whole system. For a while I also taught a course called "Introduction to Design in the Visual Arts," and that was taught primarily for the undergraduates in a concentration that doesn't exist anymore, called Architectural Sciences. It existed when I arrived and had been an invention from Gropius's time to enable Harvard undergraduates to take courses which would make it easier for them to get into architecture school, because earlier there was nothing of the kind. This became a sort of big introductory course, which attracted enormous numbers of students. It was not taught chronologically; it was taught along the lines of my Viennese seminar, morphologically. It was followed by a course which was called something like "Introduction to Environmental Design," which dealt more with architecture, urbanism, and landscape architecture.

I did not teach it all, but I coordinated lectures by others, too. I got

people from other parts of the university to lecture, like George Wald, who won the Nobel Prize for having discovered the third color receptor in the eye. He was a biologist and a wonderful lecturer. I got him to talk about color and color vision. I got an anthropologist to come in and talk about archetypal house types: the round one, the square one, and it was fascinating. This man linked house types to customs of tribes—whether the children grew up with the women or with the men, for example, and things like that. It was so very broad and rich, and it made people aware that there was more to a form than what they saw; that it was the whole culture that found its expression there. Also J. O. Brew, director of the anthropological museum, lectured.

So these courses were great fun for a while—you don't want to do that sort of thing for a long time—and they led to my getting involved with the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. Sert came one day and said, "Look, you have to help me here. You are finally going to get an art center at Harvard, and you have to get on that committee." It was the program committee, and we drew up the building program for Le Corbusier. Then I became coordinator of studies there, and eventually director of the Carpenter Center during its first ten years, which were the exciting years when we built it up and invented all these things. Again, I was lucky. I did all this in complete innocence. I just asked if I could do this or that. I didn't know how other people were doing these things; I hadn't

been trained to do these things. So what I did there had a certain freshness and originality about it that really took the university aback I guess and also found a great following among the students—they loved it.

Actually, I later learned that the tremendous success of that introductory course caused great concern to the Fine Arts Department, because their introductory course, Fine Arts 13 really wasn't so popular anymore. It was taught in strictly chronological order, you know, names and dates. So they were forced to rethink that course and they made a much better one eventually, and now they have a very fine program in this respect. At any rate, I got involved in a lot of academic administration, but I kept teaching three history courses for a long time, in alternating terms. Eventually I divided the nineteenth and twentieth century into two courses, and every second year taught one just on twentieth century, bringing it right up to date, which was exciting and very enjoyable.

SMITH: These classes then, the history classes, were directed to the whole university?

SEKLER: Yes, but they were primarily designed for architects. The university was welcome, and I did always get a few graduate students from fine arts or art undergraduates from various concentrations.

SMITH: In the Fine Arts Department you have several very prominent architectural historians.

SEKLER: Yes, but they were not there at that time, you see, they came later. When we had them, I said fine, that's great. I had no ambition to be the Fine Arts Department. In fact, I maintain you have to teach architectural history differently to architectural students than to fine art students.

SMITH: Right, that's where I was going. What's the difference between teaching architectural history in an architecture school and in a fine arts department? I'm thinking particularly of classes which are, in a sense, survey classes and have a potential audience that includes physics majors or law students or whatever?

SEKLER: When I say teaching is different in the Fine Arts Department—occasionally I was asked to give a lecture there—I'm thinking more of the graduate students. You just give them much more of the craft of art history. You show them how you arrive at your conclusions much more, and you point them to the sources, to the critical problems, and you discuss where the debate stands at a given moment.

[Tape IV, Side Two]

SEKLER: So the fine arts students are learning how to do this themselves, to prepare for the time when they will be writing their books or standing up there lecturing. But the architects are not interested in that. They can get easily bored if you go into the finer points of a critical discussion about very minute stylistic

differences of a regional style between two provinces, whereas for an art historian it's important to be able to do that and to see and to learn what this is all about.

SMITH: You have Ph.D.'s in architectural history, do you not?

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: They could study with you in the School of Architecture or they could study with someone in the Fine Arts Department. What's the distinction in terms of Ph.D. training?

SEKLER: Well, the Ph.D. here is a Ph.D. in architecture; it's not called architectural history, and I have always sent people who wanted primarily a professional historical training to the Fine Arts Department. It is true that we do get Ph.D. candidates here who have a historic bias, but I would treat them the way I would treat a graduate student in fine arts; they have to learn the ropes too. But they might also have another career goal than an art historian would have. Even though they have a historical topic, they may be thinking of going into practice dealing with historic buildings—with rehabilitation and historic preservation.

But to get back to my conviction about how you have to teach architectural students. They are very much interested in what makes the buildings work the way they work. They want the inside story. They want to

look at buildings with an architect's eye; that's the simple secret. And they also are looking for inspiration.

SMITH: The Ph.D. students then have to go through studio preparation and training?

SEKLER: They have it already when they come here. Yes, they come with a professional degree.

SMITH: So they already have a M.Arch. or a M.Arch.II?

SEKLER: That's right, yes. They don't take studio courses. But they take courses all throughout the university. Of course they take courses at the Fogg, or at the Sackler [Museum].

SMITH: Who constituted your core intellectual community at Harvard?

SEKLER: Other than in the school of design?

SMITH: Yes.

SEKLER: Well, next in line was the Fine Arts Department. I was very close with some members of the Fine Arts Department. Unfortunately most of these people have retired or died.

SMITH: Did they accept you as an art historian?

SEKLER: Oh, yes. They never forgot that I began my career at Harvard as a research fellow at the Fogg Museum. No, there was never any problem there. It's just that I am not close anymore to the other generation. I assume we are on

good terms, but everybody gets too busy with their own thing. I didn't see eye to eye with Neil Levine when he came because he was at that time plugging postmodernism. I respected him as a very intelligent scholar and ingenious interpreter. He has mellowed down in the meantime. He has weaned himself, I think, from postmodernism, and I love his work on Frank Lloyd Wright, so now we get on very well. But certainly at the beginning there was tension there, also because he felt there should be no architectural history in the architecture school at all. He felt of course it should all be done by him over there. But that's a sort of childhood illness that you often see in new people who arrive at an institution. I have always had friends in anthropology, and if I had more time I would go and sit in on many lectures over there, definitely. Otherwise, it was very much that round table group of people. When it was full, it was quite varied. There was Sydney Freedberg from fine arts, and Sam Thorne from history of law, who edited [Henry de] Bracton, the father of English common law. Thorne was an epigrapher. He gave the only courses that taught people how to read ancient documents. There was Harry Wolfson himself, Van Quine, whom I mentioned before, and a few others.

Second to that round table is the so-called Shop Club, which is a very informal club of professors who meet once a month for dinner—it has no organization, nothing like that—and one of them gives a shop talk about his own

field. So you would hear somebody from economy, from anthropology, from music, from history, from political science—it's fascinating. You don't have the time to follow those things personally, but on that evening you hear it, and everybody tries to present the material in such a way that the audience can follow. Sometimes it becomes a little difficult when someone speaks about statistics, or when Van Quine speaks. But that I have enjoyed a great deal.

Third, I am a member of the Senior Common Room of Eliot House, one of the undergraduate houses at Harvard, which was for many years headed by a man named John [H.] Finley, who was a classical scholar. He taught wonderful courses on Homer or on the Greek tragedies. He was a humanist of the old school, and a great personality—a real character, but in the best sense of the word. He assembled an interesting group in the Senior Common Room. In the meantime there have been two other masters and the Common Room has partly changed, but it's still enjoyable to go there once a week or once every second or third week. One goes for lunch on Friday, and occasionally there are dinners.

So I have been lucky in having had the chance to be exposed to a lot of the intellectual riches of this university. More recently, I got involved with Nepal, so the Sanskritist, Michael Witzel is here and I was in India together with Pramod Chandra from the Fine Arts Department. Obviously, if you are with people like Hilary Putnam and Van Quine, you get somehow infected in this

direction. It's also the people whom you would consult about something you read. You'd say, "Look, what do you think of this? Why can't I understand it?"

SMITH: At the Carpenter Center interdisciplinary work seemed to be one of the goals that you were trying to accomplish. What were the challenges and the particular successes of integrating visual studies into intellectual life instead of having it be sort of an appendage?

SEKLER: I will honestly say I don't think it ever got integrated. This was a pipe dream. There were some beautiful moments in the first years. We had I. A. Richards giving a seminar in the Carpenter Center. He wanted to do that; he felt it would be a good thing to get this integration of English literary criticism and the visual. We had some rather stunning exhibitions. One was *Writing, the Process and the Image*, and that brought calligraphists together from all over the world—Chinese, Japanese, Persian—and we had ancient inscriptions, which I got from Sterling Dow, the classical epigrapher. Sam Thorne helped me with manuscripts, with scripts, with Western calligraphy and with the writing tools. This exhibit really opened the eyes of many people.

I remember a librarian from the Yenching Library who was himself an Oriental calligrapher—I forget if it was Japanese or Chinese calligraphy. He wrote something for us for the exhibition. Afterwards he came and said to me, "You know, for me, one good thing about this exhibition was it made me realize

the West also had calligraphy." There he had been all these years at Harvard, a librarian at the Yenching Library, and he never realized that around the corner there was wonderful Persian calligraphy. Harvard has some treasures in this respect. There were the medieval manuscripts, and also those lovely Greek letters, and the Mayan hieroglyphs, which we got from the Peabody [Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology].

We showed those things under a raking spotlight, and they suddenly came to life the way people had never seen them before. So we had moments of integration there. The same thing happened with the proportion show, you know, where I got help from the zoologists the biologists, the anthropologists, and so on.

But fundamentally, even in my teaching of architectural history, I am quite aware that I came from a tradition that was dying just at that very moment. Swoboda had been the last professor in Vienna who still upheld the tradition in art history of the *Hauptvorlesung*, which the head, the *Ordinarius* has to give. Swoboda gave it in a cycle that went through four years, and he taught it all. This was also the tradition with architectural history. It was quite clear to me that this wasn't going to go on; such a synthesis was no longer possible. It was also not in the spirit of the time anymore. I still came with an enthusiasm for synthesis, and had some positive results with that, but I was fully aware that it

wasn't possible that it could go on like this. A person who also worked along those lines was György Kepes.

SMITH: I was going to ask you about him.

SEKLER: I was very close, and I still am, with György. I go to visit him. He is now in a wheelchair. We had wanted to name the Carpenter Center Center for Visual *Studies*, knowingly not visual *arts*; we never wanted to breed young artists there because we knew it was impossible. And Kepes had his Center for Advanced Visual Studies. "Art and Science" was his great slogan. He was trying to get these people from MIT together with the artists, and he had some success, but it also fizzled. Now I'm not sure whether the center even still exists. It was his personality that really animated it, and of course there was probably behind there the legacy from the Bauhaus years. Kepes was influenced by [Lazslo] Móhóly-[Nágy], and Sert, very much on the other side, believed in this integration of the arts and culture, and arts and architecture.

SMITH: You were instrumental in establishing the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies.

SEKLER: It was a symbiosis, a growing together of two separate organizations. One was the old Department of Architectural Sciences that I have mentioned earlier, which was for the architectural part; the other was a program of visual studies, which the Faculty of Arts and Sciences had somewhat grudgingly

accepted. It's typical that they did not create a department of visual studies right away when the Carpenter Center was built. They could only agree to making it a program. You see, a program you can discontinue at any moment. The rationale was that it was experimental. They wanted to see how it went, and as a program it could be freer than a department. But by that time I knew that in any university, unless you were a department you were nothing, because you had no clout. So the chairman of Architectural Sciences, [Albert] Szabo, and I sort of conspired and said, "Look, obviously we would be much stronger if we could get together." So there was much pulling and diplomacy and lining up supporters, who were interdisciplinary. One supporter was Gerry [Gerald James] Holton. He was in history of science, but he cared very much for the arts, and also, incidentally, for the history of science in the philosophical sense, like the physicist, Ernst Mach—this sort of thing. Holton has always been a supporter of this idea, but then his wife is a sculptress, so that explains it in human terms. But those were people who were helpful in finally convincing the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the Fine Arts Department that we were not setting up a dangerous competition there.

SMITH: I know there was tremendous skepticism from the Fine Arts Department.

SEKLER: Exactly. If they could have squashed it they would have squashed it.

SMITH: So in your mind was this a logical continuation of Bauhaus kind of ideas?

SEKLER: In a way, yes, I think so. Gropius was on our visiting committee during the first years. He came to me after we had presented our program and the student work and he said, "Be sure you don't structure it too rigidly; give them a lot of freedom to develop individually, even if it's chaotic." So he wasn't at all what he's often made out to be, you know, the Prussian mind that wants it all according to one theory; that wasn't the case at all. He was by far too great an educator to do that. He said students had to find their way individually and our job was to facilitate that. He advised against putting an iron clad rigid curriculum down, which everyone had to follow. That impressed me at that time.

SMITH: I think most historical looks at the translation of the Bauhaus to America have come to the conclusion that something got lost in crossing the ocean. In my own research in California I definitely found that to be the case.

SEKLER: Certainly there was some of the Bauhaus philosophy [at Harvard], but we were very much aware that the Bauhaus was a historic event that was by that time at least twenty-five years back, and there was the other strong influence there, which was Sert, CIAM, the Le Corbusier tradition, and also, if you like, the Mediterranean art tradition—the world of Picasso and Miró. After all, the

director of studio art was Mirko Basaldella, from Italy. So there was no danger this would become a sad little center of imitation Bauhaus. It had those very strong other elements in it. But we were all convinced that there were basic principles you could teach, that there were basic exercises that were useful, and then we hoped that the best students would go on from there and evolve into people who might occasionally even create works of art.

We were dead set against the notion of having a pocket-sized art school here, because that would always be dilettantish. The university wasn't willing to set up a real art department. They didn't want to have graduate students in the arts, in painting or in sculpture, so why pretend? There is a heavy load on Harvard undergraduates every term, and they may only be able to take one course at the Carpenter Center. This applies even to those majoring in art. After all, they have to fulfill the other college requirements, like math and statistics, and so on. They can't invest the kind of time and energy that a graduate student in an art school can. When this principle was lost sight of and sort of watered down, of course the result was awful daubings. People who had never drawn a line before immediately started painting. But it was noticed fairly soon—I mean, you couldn't overlook it—that you couldn't do a Mickey Mouse type of art school.

SMITH: Were you involved in the discussions that led up to the commissioning

of Le Corbusier to design the Carpenter Center building?

SEKLER: No, that was entirely between Sert and Pusey, I think.

SMITH: So it was already decided.

SEKLER: In Sert's mind it was clear, yes; it was only a question of persuading Pusey to do it—Pusey and the dean at that time, McGeorge Bundy.

SMITH: So there was never any question of having Gropius do the Carpenter Center?

SEKLER: No, but our committee was involved in finding sites. We proposed four or five sites for the center, and the present site was our last choice.

SMITH: Your last choice?

SEKLER: Yes, because it is narrow and very constrained. One choice was that corner lot where William James now stands.

SMITH: Oh, that building on the corner?

SEKLER: Yes, that white monster. It would have been much freer.

SMITH: Was there a reason for putting it next to the Fogg?

SEKLER: That was in the president's mind. He wanted it along Quincy Street. Quincy Street should be the art street of Harvard. There's something to it because you used to have the Busch-Reisinger Museum there, and the next building is the Peabody Museum, and on the right-hand side is the Semitic Museum, and I think it was already at that time clear that the school of

architecture would be there, even if it was not yet built; I can't remember that. Ideally the theater should have been built over there too. It would have been ideal because then maybe the Carpenter Center students would have made designs for the stage and would have fabricated them there, right next door to the theater. But that was not to be; the theater is in an entirely different part of the university. But there was also thought behind the president's wish to have the center next to the Fogg Museum. He hoped that this too would engender interaction.

SMITH: From your vantage point, what have been the distinctions between the different presidents of Harvard vis-à-vis the arts and architecture?

SEKLER: It's very simple: Pusey really cared about it. He relied very much I think on Sert for guidance as far as taste is concerned. There was a lot built at that time and it was the time when Mark Rothko painted a whole series of wonderful paintings for the top floor of Holyoke Center. So in a sense that was a golden time for the arts at Harvard. Pusey had two concerns. He wanted to strengthen both the Divinity School, which was very weak at that time apparently, and the arts at Harvard.

You see, the Fine Arts Department was in the midst of recovering from a period when it had had certain problems. Before [Wilhelm] Koehler and John Coolidge came—Sydney Freedberg wasn't there yet—neither of the two directors of the Fogg, [Paul J.] Sachs and [Edward Waldo] Forbes, was a trained art

historian. And Chandler Post taught Spanish art and some people maintained all they had to do was to learn these things by heart and recognize them. They also had practice courses, like carving sculptures out of soap, and they had studios. The last survivor as a studio teacher was a good man, actually—[T.] Lux Feininger, the son of Lyonel Feininger, who for a while taught studio courses up there in the Fogg Museum. He did a good job, but there were only a few half-hearted students there.

For a while they had the notion that studio art and history should be in one building together. There was the long shadow of Ruskinian thinking still there, and this only changed when they got Koehler over from Germany. He brought in a new way of looking at art-historical scholarship, and of course he killed off the practical side very quickly. But then that meant that Harvard undergraduates had practically no chance of doing anything anymore, except with Lux Feininger. Then Architectural Sciences began offering some basic design courses in some basement somewhere. For a great university it really was rather a shame that we had nothing more to offer. So you have to see the bigger context to understand the events. It was Pusey who turned this around.

[Derek] Bok, I think, had comparatively little real inner relationship either to the arts or architecture. He did what he had to do as a president, and, after all, he got a number of important buildings built. He brought important

architects, or at least he agreed to their coming. So [James] Stirling designed the Sackler building, for example. But Bok's heart wasn't in the arts or architecture; he had other concerns, very much so. Now of course we have a president [Neil] Rudenstine, whose wife is a trained art historian, and he is somebody who cares very much about these things. It's too soon to know what the consequences will be, but one indication is that he already commissioned the Venturis [Robert and Denise Scott] to remodel Memorial Hall to make it a student center. I hope they will do a good job; that's the sort of thing they really know how to do. So I look forward to seeing that finished. I think that is a good indication that there's hope. Rudenstine has shown an interest in the arts. He has instituted this one day for the arts every year now in spring. So I think there's a certain optimism indicated.

SMITH: Of course by now the Venturis are not anywhere on the cutting edge of architectural practice.

SEKLER: That's right, but they can do this sort of thing, take a historic building and make something else out of it with wit. From what I have heard from them lately, they have been much into historic preservation. It's not something Richard Meier would want to do, or you would want him to do, and it's not the place to demonstrate deconstruction—hardly.

SMITH: I wanted to talk more about questions of teaching. You seem to have a

nice balance between morphological and sociological interests in terms of how you present your material. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the texts that proved to be important in conveying your approach to architectural history, and how those texts may have changed over the years.

SEKLER: It depends on the period, and to do it properly I would have to consult my old course files to see what was on the reading list. Often, in courses here, students get a comparatively short list of required reading, and they are even assigned specific chapters to read. I have always been a believer in human curiosity. I feel that people are much more moved by what they discover for themselves. So I usually give them a quite ample bibliography that I try to keep up to date so they would really get the latest information if they wanted it, and then I would select a few good works from which I would assign chapters, or occasionally the whole thing. Obviously, in a medieval course they would read the whole of Panofsky's *Architecture and Scholasticism*. When you teach antiquity you really have no choice but to turn to some of the great standard works. You can't teach Roman without Bill [William L.] McDonald's two-volume [*The*] *Architecture of the Roman Empire*, which is a wonderful mixture of formal analysis and sociological and historical background and very well illustrated. Of course I would also have them read some of Vince [Vincent] Scully's *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*[: *Greek Sacred Architecture*]. Or

also from Giedion's *The Eternal Present*, but I would point out where it was hypothetical and where archaeologists would quarrel with it. There are excellent books on certain periods, like [I. E. S.] Edwards's *The Pyramids of Egypt*. He was the keeper of antiquities in the British Museum. It's very readable and yet it's 100 percent sound, with a British dry perfection—no speculation, just rationalism. Or I would use the works of [Walter Bryan] Emery, who wrote about archaic Egypt. Wherever possible I would also put on reserve the actual excavation reports so that people could see where what they read in these books came from: What were the data? What were the facts that were then interpreted?

In medieval, again, you have certain inspirational books that the experts feel have dubious passages in them which cannot be proved, but if you read Otto von Simson's *The Sacred Fortress*[: *Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna*], or *The Gothic Cathedral*[: *Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*], there's a lot in there that for an architectural student really is very, very valuable. But then you also have to make them read the very dry but extremely sound recent French work on Gothic. I mean Jean Bony, who came from the school of [Henri] Focillon and did *the* analysis of Gothic building from the very beginnings. I also used [Kenneth] Conant for certain things, and certain monographs.

My courses were not always organized to be survey courses, but to be a careful selection of study topics which, as I aged, focused more and more on certain key monuments or events that would be treated in depth. So that, for example, I might cover Hagia Sophia in three lectures, and accordingly I would provide various specialized articles on the statics of Hagia Sophia, and on the iconography, for example, so students really got an idea of what was involved with such a fantastic building. With this approach I would cover very little of Byzantine architecture as a whole, but I would point out that there was a very rich mine of information there, and if they were interested they could read about it. You show a few other key monuments, but you only speak about those the way you would talk about them in a survey course, so in the end they have some idea of what this is all about, but they will never forget Hagia Sophia, and they will know its proportions and dimensions, and how it works as a great building. In this case I compared Hagia Sophia to the Widener Library, which happens to be very handy; the bulk is very similar, it's just that Hagia Sophia has a gigantic dome on top of it. Now if you have seen that once, then Hagia Sophia means something to you; it isn't just a slide on a screen with a date and the name of Justinian attached. And while they were studying Hagia Sophia I also made them read an ekphrasis in translation, so for that approach there were certain authors which were applicable in each period.

For the modern period I would deliberately put two or three of the various interpretations side by side. I had them read what Giedion and Banham wrote about a specific period, and William Curtis. One assignment would be to critically compare these interpretations so they could make up their own minds. I would try to help but I would not impose a viewpoint—which is not what I would have said thirty years ago. I was not aware that I was imposing a viewpoint at that time. [laughter] I was much more passionate in the direction of the modern movement. Now I can be, in this respect, dispassionate. Not that I don't believe in the truth of the modern movement—parts of it—but I see it in historic perspective and with the literature I can tell the students, "You have to look at it from this point of view." I may ask them to read Kenneth Frampton's and Bill Curtis's surveys of modern architecture, for example.

SMITH: You also have the policy of teaching only buildings that you've visited yourself—you mentioned that.

SEKLER: Yes, as far as possible. It's not always possible.

SMITH: I assume this means teaching from your own photographs?

SEKLER: No, not necessarily. I can't use only my own photographs. I mean, there are many; you see them lined up there right behind you, all those gray boxes. There are more in those cabinets. They are all over the place. But there's a big slide collection in the school here, and the Fogg has a grandiose

collection, so I use those too.

[Tape V, Side One]

SMITH: I thought I should ask you to compare Giedion and Wittkower as scholars, as human beings, and also in terms of how they figure in your interior constellation. They seem both to have been very important mentors for you.

SEKLER: Their personalities were quite different. Giedion, at the time I got to know him, was fairly advanced in age. He was a fairly difficult man, with quite strong idiosyncracies. He was always, in some strange way, defensive, probably partly because he never found recognition in his native Switzerland. He never got a full professorial appointment in Zürich. He was turned down on the grounds that he had not *habilitiert* himself. It was just because at that time the fairly reactionary members of the faculty didn't want this man who stood for CIAM and was slightly suspect because of his left-wing sympathies. Personally I never had a warm human relationship with Giedion. I respected him, I admired some of the things he did, but I was skeptical of a lot of other things he did. Of course when I first met him I was overawed by his stature at that time in the architectural world—the great Giedion. I was among the few people who could follow his lectures because I could hear the German under his English—the way he turned sentences. He was a good but chaotic lecturer. At times he was like a preacher, sort of calling up things from somewhere in there, eyes half closed, and

then he would come out with it. He was probably a much better lecturer in his native language, but in English he must have puzzled the students a great deal. He did have a very fine eye, which I admired. His selection of images was, I would say, perfect. I learned one thing. From time to time he would drop a piece of wisdom for me, and I remember he once said, "Sekler, never show picture postcard views." He always showed the significant detail or the significant view, not the general view. He was hermetic and very reticent about his personal life. I only found out after his death that he had lied about his birth date. He pretended that he was five years younger than he was. He did have a good sense of humor and at times we laughed together. What I think I most objected to in Giedion was that he very clearly did what Wittkower did not do; that is, try to have an influence on the present architectural events, to wear the mantle of the prophet. I felt that was not the historian's business. He should give his view of the past but not slant it because he was trying to influence the events of the day. So that was Giedion.

Wittkower, on the other hand, was to me very much the pure scholar. Of course he must have had other interests too, I mean some personal ones, but I didn't know about those. He really inculcated into you the discipline of just trying to establish the facts and interpret them to the best of your ability, without regard to what happened at the moment, and without ulterior motives. He never

made any prophetic statements about what was happening. I think actually that he was quite surprised about the big, big success that *Architectural Principles* had. I don't think he expected that at all. Wittkower was a very human human being. He liked to joke, and you know about his appearance; I mean, he was a real presence. He was so tall and fairly large, but he somehow exuded, for me at least, a real aura of benevolence. When he looked at you, you had the feeling he meant well for you, which was a very good feeling. I was almost like a member of the family with Wittkower. I did meet Giedion's wife and daughter. He did invite me to his place in Zürich once, and also to his country house in Amden, but there was always some barrier in between, which was not the case with Wittkower. With Wittkower I went for dinner at his house, and we spent many hours together. Then I became friends with his son [Mario Wittkower], who was closer to my age. We went with a girl in a rubber boat down the Thames—you know, that sort of thing. So that's why I certainly preserve the most pleasant and fond memories of Rudi Wittkower.

SMITH: You have written that Giedion marked the end of a tradition rather than the beginning, which is a rather ironic view of him.

SEKLER: I mean that tradition of the great synthesis. It turns out that that obviously was his life's ambition, that he really wanted to pull it all together—from the beginnings of architecture to the late twentieth century—and

present a coherent system for this, which was his space conceptions. In the end, I did not find the way he used space conception—*Raumauffassung*—entirely convincing. Though he had correct elements in there, which are exactly what Frankl has in his book. I mean, there is such a thing as *Raumauffassung*, but there's a subtle difference in the way Giedion uses it and others use it.

SMITH: Was the problem his application, or was it the ambition? Is it possible to create an all-embracing *Kunstwissenschaft*?

SEKLER: I was just saying one shouldn't wear the mantle of the prophet. So far nobody has succeeded. I read most of the things that were written in Vienna when they invented *Kunstwissenschaft*—young Sedlmayr and others at that time—and the things they wrote were highly intelligent and partly very esoteric. There was Frankl's *Das System der Kunstwissenschaft*, a volume which I think no living human being ever read through completely—it's so big and it's so esoteric and involved—but I have not seen a *Kunstwissenschaft* established the way these people were hoping for it. I don't think Giedion wanted to establish a *Kunstwissenschaft*; he just wanted to tell the world that there was a way of looking at the totality of architecture that he had discovered, and that this was through the space conceptions.

SMITH: But it was a totalizing view.

SEKLER: It was a totalizing view, yes, and in observing what happened I feel

that the era of the totalizing view, at least for a time, has come to an end.

SMITH: One of the most prominent criticisms of the modern movement has been that it was founded on a false totalizing view.

SEKLER: The problem is that without a totalizing view you don't have a clear goal and so it's much easier to go in circles or go off into little side roads and get lost. I have no answer to this paradox.

SMITH: In your Hoffmann study [*Josef Hoffmann, The Architectural Work: Monograph and Catalogue of Works* (1982)] you wrote that Klimt and Kokoschka had been sources of direction, giving stimuli to architects at the time. I'm wondering, extrapolating from that, to what degree did the interests of the faculty and students here at Harvard correspond to prevailing visual art trends, such as abstract expressionism, op art, pop art, post-painterly abstraction, or the recovery of figure and narrative?

SEKLER: I think there was a time lag or time differential there. The architects here were very interested in the visual arts, definitely, but it was really the generation of artists who were at that moment the great masters, but in a way, of the past: Miró, Picasso, the cubists, to some degree surrealism, very much still De Stijl, because it lent itself to direct architectural application. There was not so much interest in the current avant-garde movement within the arts . . . though abstract expressionism, yes, people were pretty much aware of that, but it was

hard to translate it into architecture. I'm trying hard to think of anything where I could make a direct connection. There is a direct connection between the New Brutalism and *arte povera*; there's no doubt that that exists, but abstract expressionism— There is maybe a connection. There was this great interest in architecture of the Team X generation—the open form as opposed to the closed form. Fumihiko Maki wrote about it with regard to urbanism. That meant designs that would branch out in an almost organic way, with many elements. If you looked at the plans you would see bifurcation upon bifurcation. I am thinking of the designs for the Free University in Berlin, or Toulouse le Mirail by [Georges] Candilis—very free, open forms, as opposed to the clearly defined closed forms that were very important in the modern movement.

Modern movement buildings may have been open in the sense that the space was defined only by planar elements, but that space was very clearly defined; you couldn't add on to that sort of thing. You couldn't add a wing to the Barcelona Pavilion; if you did you would destroy it. Whereas these other open form buildings were capable of growth and change, and that is somewhat the freedom of abstract expressionism, the way it happens. Some of those plans, when you look at them, really look like abstract expressionist paintings.

SMITH: So as an influence you would only see it if you looked at the plan?

SEKLER: That's right.

SMITH: That's interesting. What about the relationship of pop art and pop architecture?

SEKLER: Well, that seems obvious. I mean I can think of plenty of examples. The Venturis would be unthinkable without pop art.

SMITH: First, you think?

SEKLER: First, yes.

SMITH: So it's not that they went to Las Vegas and were impressed by it?

SEKLER: Oh, no. They had their exhibition *Signs of Life*, which was before Las Vegas.

SMITH: What about students and faculty here?

SEKLER: Here, the Le Corbusier direction prevailed for a long time. I wanted to make a final comment on the interaction of the arts and architecture. You see, with conceptual art, obviously the visual arts had reached a formal point zero; there was no form left, no image, there was just an idea. In architecture, what do you do then? You theorize; you don't build anymore. You only build mental constructs. Then of course the pendulum swings and then the figure and the still life are rediscovered, and in architecture people rediscover classical villas and Queen Anne houses, etc.

SMITH: Though some of that, like the rediscovery of classical villas and Queen Anne houses, has to do with the demand of the public for these things.

SEKLER: Yes, but that demand of the public was there all the time; it just wasn't fulfilled. You could always get a classical villa. There was an architect in New England who kept designing for rich patrons who wanted neo-Georgian buildings. I remember when I came to the school we all made fun of it, but the man made a lot of money designing those rich mansions. So that still existed.

SMITH: But historical preservation did not exist in the way that it does now.

SEKLER: No, it did not. Definitely not.

SMITH: We'll get into that, but I wanted to talk with you about how new interests got integrated into architectural studies and what your role may or may not have been with those. I suppose one obvious thing is both the growing criticism of modernist orthodoxy and then the blossoming of postmodernism.

SEKLER: I can honestly say that I had nothing to do with that, because I was a defender of modernism. [laughter] But it helped me to see modernism not as such a monolith, and to understand better where its shortcomings were and how it was to be seen historically. It sort of freed me in that sense to be able to look at it from a historical perspective—as far as it is possible for anything that falls into personal time as opposed to historical time.

SMITH: Did you teach postmodernism?

SEKLER: Well, you had to, of course.

SMITH: How did you approach it?

SEKLER: I just presented it and I gave my criticisms, what I thought was dubious about it.

SMITH: What about industrial archaeology?

SEKLER: I'm aware of roughly when it happened and how it blossomed out, but I really had nothing to do with it; I never went into that. In the nineteenth century I always included the classical monuments, the big railroad sheds and bridges, but I wasn't particularly attracted to go and do research on old mines or old water pumps—you know, the sort of thing industrial archaeologists do. Though I admire them and I read that literature when I can.

SMITH: What about your students?

SEKLER: I had one who was absolutely captivated by this subject and it became his life's work. That is in a way a tragic story. This was Randy [Randolph] Langenbach, who was an undergraduate in that introductory course that I mentioned much earlier. I think it was in that course that he wrote a paper about the Amoskeag Mills, which are here in New England. It was one of the great mill complexes that were just at that time folding up. I think the last mill was just closing, and this gigantic complex was really a monument of very impressive qualities. If you have never seen it, here is the book.

SMITH: The Tamara Hareven book [*Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City*].

SEKLER: Yes. You see, Randy was her husband. He took the photographs. He fell in love with the Amoskeag Mills, and he became an industrial archaeologist-cum-photographer. He took splendid photographs of mills, he mounted several fine exhibitions, and he did a thesis here where I was one of the thesis advisers. It was an architecture thesis about the rehabilitation of one of the northern English mill complexes, so one of the design professors was also included on the committee. There is a special program in historical preservation in York, and I had encouraged Randy to go there to get a degree. There he got to know those Yorkshire mill complexes, and he made a design project about that. He went on from there into historic preservation, got a job at Berkeley actually, and eventually lost all his papers and all his photographs in the great Berkeley fire. He got so discouraged by that that he gave up his career, and he now works in the Office of Disaster Preparedness in California, because he felt he wanted to see to it that such a thing could never happen again. But as far as I can see he is lost for historic preservation. So that's my contact to industrial archaeology, and I certainly seem to have put him on that path, but I'm sorry that it didn't have a happy ending.

SMITH: What about ecological approaches to architecture?

SEKLER: Now this is very topical. There are really sort of wave movements there because we now have Ian McHarg as a visitor here in the school. But he

was also a visitor here some ten years ago and I remember a terrific lecture he gave where he spoke about ecological architecture. At that time it was also quite topical and then it was submerged by postmodernism. I don't think it was ever in the foreground as seriously as it is now. I think that is really a new development. But there have been some initiatives in that direction, on and off: people building houses into the land, into the sand dunes, or into the hills, having things growing on roofs, or dealing with natural cooling and heating rather than artificial.

We had a man on the faculty roughly ten years ago who was very much into that sort of thing because we talked about it, and I came to one or two of his classes to assist when it was a question of finding historic prototypes. In Muslim architecture you find those wonderful gardens with small watercourses, and in tropical countries you have cross ventilation. I always gave one or two examples, as long as I taught that introductory course, just to point out to students that that was also a concern. I showed them those famous African huts, you know, the beehive-shaped ones that are ecologically and structurally fantastically good. They are not built anymore because they are considered backward and old-fashioned. So they have been forgotten and replaced by prefabricated concrete block and corrugated iron, which becomes terribly hot—awful compared to those climactically much better old mud huts.

SMITH: After 1970 did you begin to have students who wanted to do gender studies of architecture?

SEKLER: No. This is now very much in. There are quite a number of courses given, by women chiefly, and I believe now it is a subject of interest throughout the whole university; it's all over the place, but in the seventies, no.

SMITH: You didn't have students coming to you and saying, "I want to do something like what Dolores Hayden has done"?

SEKLER: She was my student.

SMITH: Oh, she was?

SEKLER: Yes. But I didn't encourage her, particularly. I mean, to me it's all the same. As long as the historical material is correct, it's up to you how you interpret it. If you want to interpret it from a gender point of view, that's fine, as long as you don't falsify the facts. Dolores was moved in this direction, and she is very socially conscious—quite a brilliant woman.

SMITH: What about people wanting to do studies of non-Western architecture?

SEKLER: I did not teach that; I didn't feel qualified to do it, but if somebody wanted to do a non-Western project, I encouraged it, and to the best of my ability I advised them, or I found somebody who could help them. In many cases my policy was not to teach something which experts at the other corner of the university could teach much better. So, if somebody came to me and said, "I

want to study pre-Columbian architecture," I said, "That's great. I'll call up professor [Gordon R.] Willey in the Peabody Museum and see if he will take you on." Or if somebody came with a philosophical topic I got one of the philosophers to work with that student. I think that's very salutary.

Architects, including myself, at least at the beginning, have this tendency to think they are really the *homo universalis* still, the only surviving specimen of that genius who can do anything, because they have to deal with so much. They have to deal with the whole richness of human life in some ways. But it has its obvious dangers. Of course I got very much involved with non-Western architecture when the Nepal thing came along. So there I am fairly competent now too.

SMITH: Did you have students who wanted to do north Indian or Nepali architecture who you could then feel comfortable to work with?

SEKLER: In the seminar I had a few students who worked on Fatehpur Sikri, which is an abandoned city. It's a fabulous place, like a fairy tale—a Mogul city that has survived in perfect condition. It's an architect's paradise because it's all modular and proportioned, and it's in beautiful red sandstone. If you ever get the chance, go to Fatehpur Sikri; it's near Agra. So, yes, I could work with those students, having been to Fatehpur Sikri on an unforgettable trip in '62, when it was still quite remote. There hadn't yet been this great tourist explosion for

India. It was difficult to get there. There was no place to stay except in a government guest house which still had one of those overhead fans that was worked by somebody in the next room who had a string attached to his foot, and his foot went forward or backward and then this thing would move the hot air. If this man fell asleep, the fan became slower and slower and then it would stop. Then he would wake up again and the fan would start again. But this is a footnote. So I knew about Fatehpur Sikri from firsthand experience and I then studied it in the archaeological survey of India. The good Brits had done very exact drawings in the 1880s, so we used those.

Soon after that, Pramod Chandra came to the Fine Arts Department. He is Indian and he is *the* specialist for Indian art and architecture, so if anyone wanted to study Indian architecture I would collaborate with Pramod in working with that student, to be sure that we saw it from all sides. Pramod enjoyed getting the architectural input, and I was happy to have somebody who could read Sanskrit and who knew the Indian treatises.

As for Nepal, I am glad to say that now Michael Witzel is here, and he can read the texts that I can't read. But about the architecture I know enough from my own firsthand experience, observation, and study. For Chinese and Japanese architecture there was [John M.] Rosenfield, who retired only recently, and now they have a replacement, so that's covered.

SMITH: What about technology and architecture? There has been increasing interest in this.

SEKLER: From the beginning I was a true son of the modern movement in the sense that I felt you could not understand architecture without technology. It is a real conditioning factor; that's how it is made.

SMITH: Okay. There's something that's not exactly anthropological architecture, but it involves the whole realm of the symbolic and the religious in architecture—what you've talked about as gestures of rites of passage.

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: How have you integrated that into your teaching?

SEKLER: That was simply one of the points I always stressed. I would talk about one of my selected examples from the technical point of view, how it was constructed, what were those parameters; from the point of view of the artistic volition, the *Kunstwollen* that found its expression there; why they shaped the spaces they did—and often there was a ritual function. But whenever possible I would point in the direction of the higher metaphysical or spiritual message this building was conveying or meant to convey, or the belief system that inspired it. As I said earlier when we talked about this, until the middle of the seventeenth century—and in some cases later still, right up to 1800—it wasn't difficult at all to prove your arguments with written evidence of contemporaries—what they had

to say about it and what they believed about it.

SMITH: But nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture is more problematic.

SEKLER: You also have written evidence there, in architects' pronouncements and critics' pronouncements. In fact, the nineteenth century is rich in architectural criticism, and they speak a lot about the symbolism of architecture. In this country you had Alexander Jackson Davis, who was very explicit about what architecture said about domesticity and good citizenship and all that.

SMITH: The turn to symbolism does seem to be a differentiation from the high modern movement, but do you see it as a continuation of what you were doing before?

SEKLER: I don't follow your question. Maybe you can put it some other way.

SMITH: The modern movement at mid-century, around 1950, seemed to be turning away from metaphysical questions and looking at what the needs were—

SEKLER: Yes. What the technology was, yes.

SMITH: Right. And it was anti-historicist.

SEKLER: Yes, that's right.

SMITH: So how does a return to symbolism correspond to the modern program? Does it represent a development or a rupture?

SEKLER: I don't see a real return to symbolism occurring at that moment, because it seems to me what postmodernism brings is a pseudosymbolism. I

mean, those are symbols that don't have the force of a genuine symbol anymore. They are the old forms, but they are not really moving anybody, really. They may be signs, but not symbols. The genuine symbol lived on through the fifties. It occurred rarely, but it did occur here and there. It certainly occurred at Ronchamp, at La Tourette; that's why Corbu is so important. There were few others. Then, roughly ten years afterwards, Louis Kahn bursts on the scene and it's all back to highly symbolic buildings, with a genuine symbolism.

SMITH: And you say his success was due to the fact that he answered a need for additional meaning?

SEKLER: Maybe this was due to the fact that he did it so well, and it was so genuine with him. When you read his utterances, or if you ever met him and talked to him, it became clear to you that here was somebody who was really pondering these matters—searching, groping, going into depth, deeper and deeper and deeper. That's why it took so long for his projects to get designed and built, but he had it in him to create authentic symbols.

SMITH: There's that word again, "authentic," which you defined yesterday in terms that would be highly individualized—each person has in him or her self a distinct authenticity.

SEKLER: Something that is really genuinely their own—one hopes. There was a playwright in Vienna, [Hans] Weigel. He was also a journalist and a poet with

a fine mind, very polemical, and he wrote a play called *The Fiftieth Birthday*. It was a symbolist play, in a sense, where this average man sees himself being called before this tribunal on his fiftieth birthday. They tell him they will acquit him if he can whistle or sing one melody of his own. He tries very hard and he comes out with the *Donauwalzer*, or the *Radetzky March*, or the latest *Schlager*. He cannot do anything of his own. And then it goes on, and he is profoundly shaken up by this, and they sort of give him a reprieve and say, "We'll give you a few more years to see if you can't find something of your own." That is what I am talking about in that sense. And that applies to works as well as to the creators of works. But with Kahn you had this feeling . . . he comes across somehow. You must have been to La Jolla, to the Salk [Institute]?

SMITH: Oh, yes.

SEKLER: If you walk in that courtyard, doesn't it give you a very special feeling? It changes for you for that while, while you are in there; that's what I am talking about.

[Tape V, Side Two]

SMITH: When you designed the Austria Culture House, you knew that it wasn't going to be there forever, I assume.

SEKLER: Yes, that was clear, but at the same time I knew also that this building wasn't just a tool in that practical sense. Clearly, I was supposed to get

a message across here about the culture of little Austria. So I used the help of the arts, but I didn't make an exaggerated gesture with the building itself. The building is fairly urbane; it fits itself into that street, or it used to. The whole thing has been changed now. The surroundings are quite different from what they were. They built a skyscraper right next to that building. So the speciality comes in these few artistic points—there's a relief and there's this bronze sculpture—and these things tell people that this is something special.

SMITH: I wonder what that says about architectural history. If most architecture has a limited use and a limited time period, then architectural history almost by definition has to deal with enduring monuments.

SEKLER: Good architectural history will always include the domestic architecture as well, in other words, the houses that change and go and are rebuilt, plus the settlement forms—the villages, markets, and towns—where what endures is the street pattern, but where the individual elements, except for the monuments, change. So, in a way, I feel somebody who only teaches monuments that were created to endure is not teaching architectural history correctly. They also have to teach the houses—these modest containers of life.

SMITH: To the degree that we can reconstruct what they were.

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: I want to switch just a little bit to the question of career placement and

what you felt your responsibilities were toward your students in that area.

SEKLER: My responsibility, in a sense, was limited to writing letters, because the school had an office with professional career advising and placement, and firms came to recruit. Being historically minded, I have kept a file that's about a yard wide by now, with copies of all the letters of recommendation that I have written. I am very proud because a number of my students were quite successful. I just got a really enthusiastic letter from somebody who was admitted to the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and to this man that means a real change in his life. He will finally get the chance to get a break so he can really sit down and think and write his magnum opus. He writes, "I am deeply grateful to you for the wonderful recommendation you wrote on my behalf. I am sure it was the letter that swung the balance in my favor and I shall be eternally grateful." I don't know whether it was that letter. I am sure there were several other letters, but I am glad to have helped many people in this way.

SMITH: Your students, by and large, are not going to become architectural historians.

SEKLER: Well, this one is. He is already, but many are just architects, yes.

SMITH: But then you had someone like William Curtis, who has become quite prominent.

SEKLER: Yes. I certainly wrote a number of letters for him. Then there are

the letters I have to write when people are up for tenure. But there have been a good number of students who became architectural historians.

SMITH: What about the growth of the student population? I think this has affected almost all the arts; the student population is growing faster than the economy can possibly absorb it.

SEKLER: It dismays me a great deal. It has been most dramatically brought home in Vienna now. Thirty years ago, the maximum student population at the faculty of architecture at the Vienna Technical University was about three hundred—in all years together—and now they have some four thousand students, but about the same number of faculty. And at my old institute I could witness the pressure when I was there. Continuously there were students trying to get appointments. To get a criticism you might have to wait six weeks just to get a spot on the list. And the assistants were frazzled. They were of good will, trying to do their best, but trying to do the impossible. People tell me there's not enough room in the lecture halls. People come half an hour early if they can, just to get standing room. I heard the same from the art-historical institute; it's awful. The institute library can't function properly anymore because there are too many users. Even in our school here, everybody knows that I am critical of too high a number of students in architecture. I've said it should be cut back again, because first of all, the quality of instruction is better if you have a smaller

group, if you know the people intimately, and secondly, who needs so many architects? Instead, they are founding new architecture schools on every corner. It's really crazy.

SMITH: You exist in two somewhat overlapping but really quite distinct intellectual worlds; one Anglo-American, and the other Austrian—German-speaking. Obviously that has many benefits, but has it also created problems for you in terms of who you conceive your audience to be and how you write?

SEKLER: No, not in that respect, but it has certainly created personal problems. There's no doubt that it makes life more difficult if you live in two worlds than if you live in one. It makes it richer, too, but you pay a price for that. As far as audience is concerned, on the whole I only talk to a limited number of typical audiences: architecture students, architects, architectural historians, preservationists, art historians, or people interested in those fields. And they, as specialists, have a lot in common no matter where they are. They have the same questions, the same problems.

People often ask me what is the difference between the architecture students in Vienna and here. Are they more talented in Vienna? Are they more eager? There is no difference. Here and there you get talented ones and weak ones, eager ones and somewhat apathetic ones. Here you have the advantage that

it is a highly select group of students, whereas in Vienna they have to take everybody who has his *Matura zeugnis*, so that's a difference. Here the system is different. You can count on studio criticism two afternoons a week. Your instructor will be there from two to five or from two to six. In Vienna, you may have to wait six weeks till you get an appointment through an assistant; then you may see your professor personally once or twice a term, if you are lucky. So these are big differences. But in the human material I see no difference.

SMITH: But aren't there cultural differences?

SEKLER: No, architecture is a subculture that, as such, is stronger I would say, than most general culture backgrounds. In other words, a young Indian architect will have more in common with a young American architect than with, say, a Hindu guru in Amritsar.

SMITH: Yes, but it may be that in two countries you have different technologies and you have different local constructions.

SEKLER: But those are, to me, superficial differences; you can learn the technology.

SMITH: You also have different clients.

SEKLER: They are not so different.

SMITH: No?

SEKLER: No. But there is a basic difference, especially speaking of India, in

the education system you came up through. The Indian educational system is still very much learning by rote. You have to learn the answers to the questions on the final exam, and whoever has learned them best by heart will get the highest points. Independent thinking is not encouraged. I have this from an Indian friend who is an architect. He has children who are now of college age, and he was considering emigrating from India just so that his children would get a college education outside India, because he himself knows the world and knows there are other systems.

This applies to Austria also. An Austrian *Mittelschule* leading to the *Matura* is, after all, quite different from an American college. When you enter architecture school in America you are coming from a college. In Austria you come right from the *Mittelschule*—maybe after half a year of military service, but then you come. So that is a real difference in background, in what they know, and how they have been trained to learn or not to learn. Also of course there are differences in how their personalities have developed, but everybody knows that.

SMITH: What about in terms of scholarship. Are there distinctions in the ways Americans view scholarship—their epistemological assumptions—and the way Austrians or the German-speaking scholars would approach disciplinary questions?

SEKLER: There certainly were significant differences when I came here. I

think by now there hardly are, because people read the literature. The *Art Bulletin* is in every art history institute in Austria, in addition to other such periodicals. And people here in the U.S. have the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*. Then of course they read the books, so they get pretty much the same exposure. In Vienna, because of the tradition, you might get a greater awareness that there was a Riegl and a Schlosser, that these are different ways of thinking about problems, and it's easier for those people to read the originals because they are right there; they are a living memory, more or less. Here, students have to read translations, and Riegl has only been discovered in the last ten years or so. As for Schlosser, well, people read *Letteratura artistica*. I don't even know whether there is finally an English translation of the *Kunstliteratur*. There's not such a living tradition here from these people, but in method I would say there is a complete awareness of what's going on. You find now gender studies coming up, and there was the wave of semiotic and structuralist interpretations, and in the German universities it goes to the same extremes as it does in this country.

SMITH: How did these waves of intellectual fashion in American universities affect you? How would you deal with a student who came to you with a strong bias toward Foucault, for instance?

SEKLER: My philosophy has always been to let them do what they wanted,

because then they would be motivated. As far as I could, I have always treated assignments in such a way that students had great latitude to select the topic they wanted to handle, and then they had to do it well. If it was something which I felt was beyond my ken, I found somebody in the university who was really expert on it. So when people were trying to snow me under with some super semiological analysis, I would just get somebody over from linguistics or from philosophy and get their comments, and then just hand them to the student. I have learned a lot in the process, of course; we all learn from our students.

SMITH: Let's switch over to preservation, which has been a big part of your life.

SEKLER: Yes, it turns out so.

SMITH: As far as I could tell, your first preservation work seemed to have come in 1953 when you went to Athens to study.

SEKLER: Actually, my first preservation work was the church on the Leopoldsberg.

SMITH: Oh, right.

SEKLER: This project put me on the map in that area. People now in Vienna know that there was this man who was an assistant at the chair where they teach historic monuments care, and he worked with Holey and Engelhart, who both had names in that field, and he restored this church. So this was a label attached to

me, or to a part of me, and when Austria was invited to send a member to the newly-founded UNESCO committee on historic monuments, somebody in the realms of power said, "Why not send Sekler? He speaks English and French." This was important. Often when we had foreign visitors coming to the technical university, they landed with me. Having been in England I could really use the language reasonably well.

So I found myself, to my great delight, sent to Paris at UNESCO expense to attend this committee meeting. The committee met at regular intervals and then we were invited to go to Istanbul. Athens was only a stopover, and I can't remember if it was on the way back or on the way there. In Istanbul the problem was at that time the Turkish authorities did not care very much, if anything, about the Byzantine monuments, but there were intelligent Turkish archaeologists who said something had to be done to prevent these buildings from going to ruin. The authorities only cared about the mosques. So UNESCO was informed that it would be a good idea to send a mission to Istanbul to show that these monuments also were important. You know, it often happens that UNESCO acts as a sort of moral authority that helps people who themselves don't have clout enough or who are not listened to by the bigwigs and politicians.

We had this wonderful mission. We met in the Topkapi Saray, and we were shown a lot of things and we observed them and visited and had our debates

about what should be done. Finally we came up with recommendations, which I think served the purpose. I became friends with a number of colleagues on the committee, like J. O. Brew, the director of the Peabody Museum, [Masaru] Sekino, who was the head of the Japanese historic monuments service, and Guglielmo De Angelis Dossat, who was the head of the Italian monuments service. So I developed a lot of interesting contacts in these countries, who were very helpful when I went on tours of study, because it's the historic monuments people who know what's going on, where the important monuments are, and what are the problems.

So this was a little entrance at the beginning of my career. That committee eventually was followed by the organization of a whole division of cultural heritage in UNESCO. I was a known entity there from the times of the committee, and the occasion came when they needed to send somebody to Nepal. A former graduate student of mine, an Austrian, worked for Sert in urban design and town planning. The question came up to Sert, whether he knew somebody who could help the government of Nepal to build up a town planning department. He suggested this former student, Carl Pruscha, who is now the head of the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Pruscha came to me and asked me what I thought of that job, and whether he should take it. I had by that time been to Nepal privately. It had nothing to do with UNESCO or with anything. I went

because a man came into my office once in Harvard Yard, and said he wanted to do a dissertation on Nepalese architecture. I said I couldn't help him because I didn't even know what it looked like. He got absolutely upset and he said, "You have to see it. This is unique. This is the last remaining example in the world of something like that—a living culture." He convinced me. He had drawings and photographs, and I thought that if somebody was so excited about something, I should see it. I couldn't help him at that time, but I had a chance at the last moment to still build this into the itinerary of a journey that had already been planned.

I had a Guggenheim grant at that time, to study selected urban spaces. At the last moment I was able to add this flight from Patna to Kathmandu, which was quite an adventure at that time. It was 1962 and Nepal had only been open to the West for about ten years. I was tourist number three thousand, roughly, and I was absolutely overwhelmed. This was really incredible. Here was a living culture, but it was the Middle Ages. What I had been lecturing about and reading about was happening here in the streets: people going to the temple to worship; women sitting in front of their houses nursing their babies; a corpse being carried to the burning ghat; processions, music, beggars; everything absolutely harmonious. Not necessarily all beautiful, but everything authentic, very real, with a lovely landscape—the Kathmandu Valley with the high

Himalayas behind it, snow-capped peaks. It was like a fairy tale. Especially one town, Patan, not far from Kathmandu, where I went the last day to the main square, the Patan Darbār Square, in front of the former royal palace. It has a monument density like the Piazza della Signoria in Florence. In a small area there are so many temples, statues, and frescoes.

I was completely overwhelmed. I thought this was as good as anything I had ever seen, and certainly as good as any of the famous Italian piazze or hill towns. So I advised Pruscha absolutely to go there and do it, and help to get this thing straightened out. They needed planning, otherwise it would all be messed up. He stayed there for seven years, but very soon he discovered that a main element of planning would have to be to preserve the historic areas—not only buildings but areas, like a Darbār Square. So he asked UNESCO to send an expert for historic monuments preservation. I was sent to Nepal for the first time, officially, in 1972. I did a report and I came back even more excited.

SMITH: Were you part of a team or did you go by yourself?

SEKLER: I was by myself. Or wait a moment. Was [Raymond] Allchin already with me? It could be. In one of the first missions I was with Raymond Allchin, but I don't think he was with me the very first time, no. It was later. But what was lucky was that I convinced the Austrian government and UNESCO that somebody ought to make an protective inventory of all of this.

SMITH: You said that you convinced the Austrian government?

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: Not the Nepali government?

SEKLER: No. I mean, that was hopeless. They would say it was a good idea, but then you would be waiting forever. No, I convinced the Austrian government to finance it. The inventory was printed in Austria, UNESCO helped to pay for it, and Pruscha supervised it in situ with a team of Nepalese. Raymond Allchin, a British archaeologist and specialist for India, and myself set up the model of how to do it and wrote the sample inventory descriptions. Then I was lucky to have met an assistant director of UNESCO, who was a British academic at the time, a sociologist. When he heard about this place he got interested and he went there himself, and he was also convinced that UNESCO had to do something to save these things before it was too late. So it was decided to send a team to do a master plan for the conservation of the historic heritage of the Kathmandu Valley. That was the team which I led—actually, against my will. I just wanted to be a member. I didn't want to have to write the final report and be responsible for everything, but they somehow decided I should do that. It was a very nice team on the whole, very good specialists. There was a German museum director ethnologist, and Corneille Jest, a French anthropologist, who knows more about the Himalayas than anyone I know. He speaks Tibetan and Nepalese; he has

been there so many times. There was a landscape architect, Christopher Tunnard, who is not alive anymore; he was at Yale at that time. There was somebody from the World Health Organization, and a jurist from UNESCO who specialized in preservation law, and an economist.

So we really investigated all those angles and came up with a master plan that was indeed accepted by the government, and its main recommendations have been slowly implemented—not all of them, unfortunately, but it was accepted as a government policy document. It recommended the setting up of special zones of protection, which was done, and the director-general of UNESCO was moved to declare sections of the Kathmandu Valley as a World Heritage Site. There was an international campaign, which is still going on, for the safeguarding of the Kathmandu Valley. It's fundamentally a fund-raising campaign for the work to be done there. And this campaign has a review committee of which I am the one foreign member; otherwise it is UNESCO and the local Nepalese government. I was sent there several times on various missions.

From my own initiative—I didn't want to wait until something was done officially—I did a master plan study for the conservation of that Patan Darbār Square that had so impressed me. That has been the main object of my personal preservation efforts. Here it is; this was done with support from the school.
[shows photos] I am only showing it to you because it gives you an idea of what

this Darbār Square is all about, why I got so excited about it, and why I am trying to save it. Of course you could justifiably say, "If there are so many important historic monuments in this country or in Europe, why go to Nepal? Why go to the Himalayas?" But in the seventies there was nowhere in the world a totality so intact, with a living culture still going on inside, still being used the way it had been used for centuries. This is a plan of Darbār Square. This is the ancient Royal Palace with its courtyards, and these are all temples. There's a big bell here, this is another temple, and there are monuments on columns. The whole is physically not very large, but it is extremely monumental. It is extremely rich, three dimensionally. There's a sunken fountain, a stepwell where you have to go down, and opposite you have one temple and there is another temple.

The final act, let's say, in my relation to this work was to found, with a few friends here, the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, which is a charitable foundation incorporated here in Massachusetts to raise funds for preservation there. A former student of mine is "Our Man" in Kathmandu. He is a young architect who lives out there. We have restored two temples and we are working on our third monument now. This has made a difference, because it has impressed the Nepalese themselves. "If these people come to restore our temples there must be something to them," so they have even started to make their own

contributions to that cause.

SMITH: Does the money come primarily from corporations?

SEKLER: No, it comes from individuals, usually people who have been there and who fell in love with it or understand why one would be. The last American ambassador, a lady, was very supportive, because she also fell in love with the monuments there. Some of the money came from other governments when their development offices noticed that we were an organization that really did something, where you could be sure your money would be used immediately and effectively without a lot of it trickling into unknown channels. They gave us funds which allowed us to do this work rapidly and well.

These are examples of how, before our trust started working, things were changed for the worst—you know, before and after photographs.

SMITH: [looking at photos] So you have more—I hate to call them "modern" buildings because they're not—

SEKLER: They're just nondescript, horrible buildings.

SMITH: Yes. But they're new buildings.

SEKLER: They're new buildings, yes. The greatest threat now is that people want to be modern and also they want to invest their money. There's inflation and their main investment is to build, so even if there's the smallest plot of land, they build. This was at right angles to the Darbār Square area in 1972, and here

is the same area in 1975. These buildings were built without permits.

SMITH: So you propose that the government put tighter restrictions?

SEKLER: Absolutely. They do have laws and statutes and regulations; it's just a question of enforcement, a question of education. We recommended in the master plan that a Nepal Heritage Society should be founded, so the preservation work will be done by themselves eventually. Public awareness begins to grow, but it's a slow uphill battle, and if you can just save some of the jewels and some of those urban spaces, it will already be a great victory.

SMITH: Can you preserve an environment like that without freezing it into some sort of international park, like Venice has become?

SEKLER: No. You cannot freeze Kathmandu in that way. It's already turning rapidly into a second Calcutta, let's say, or Bombay on a smaller scale, but you can at least save some enclaves in there, some temple precincts, some former monasteries, so these people will be as happy as we are in a Western city if we find that a palazzo from the sixteenth century has been preserved, or a church from the Middle Ages; it's the same attitude. In Patan one can save a little more because that is less spoiled and it is perfectly possible not to put reinforced concrete structures in there. It's only a question of simple precautions—certain height limits, certain materials. Life has to go on, that's clear, but it's a question of how it goes on; it can go on badly or in a somewhat controlled fashion. The

best example is Bhaktapur, where the Germans have done a great deal of work, including upgrading of infrastructure, and that is the best preserved of the three Kathmandu Valley cities. There the local people now are very inspired; they want to keep it like that because they are very proud of it. They also now charge tourists who come into Bhaktapur fifty rupees to enter the city.

SMITH: Which is how much in American money?

SEKLER: It's not much; it is one dollar. But in Nepal it is more in value, and they use the money for historic conservation. So I welcome it and I congratulated them on this initiative.

SMITH: What about the question of upgrading housing accommodations?

SEKLER: I had a doctoral student here, a Nepalese, whose thesis was housing standards for the Kathmandu Valley. It's another problem to find housing that is congenial and yet economical and uses modern technology where it's appropriate, but also keeps some of the positive qualities of the ancient housing, which was very well insulated, being thick brick walls and heavy roofs. Often the modern ones are thin concrete walls and corrugated iron roofs and the people are very unhappy in them in summer.

SMITH: There's a parallel there to what you were mentioning about African huts.

SEKLER: In the Third World, in many, many places you have the same

problem. The ideal is to be able to reconcile the best of the old with the best of the new. Yes, give them proper insulation against humidity, and proper insulation under the roof so the water wouldn't get in during the monsoon, and give them prefabricated floors to save money, but stick with the much cheaper, good old walls. They stopped doing that because they thought it wasn't modern. We shouldn't impose Western plans for these houses on them if their way of life is very different.

SMITH: That implies that "modern" is also a state of mind rather than an objective set of technological conditions.

SEKLER: Oh very much so, of course. You become very much aware of this when you work in a country like that. A young man wants to have a motorbike and a transistor radio, and now everywhere they rent video cassettes out.

[laughter]

SMITH: Aren't there maybe some lessons in terms of the Western countries, that perhaps in Vienna the *Höfe* is a good form?

SEKLER: Well, that's what people are trying out again. I don't have a clear answer. They certainly have good qualities, but they also imply that some people will have their flats facing north and they will forever be in the shade. You can't get around that; if you build a four-square thing, one orientation will be wrong.

SMITH: Yes, unless everybody has an apartment including both sides: looking

into the *Höfe* as well as out onto the street.

SEKLER: Yes, but then it's a question of economy. If you can do that, yes, sure, but then the building must not be too thick; I mean, it must just be two rooms. Those apartments that are in the *Höfe* don't get the kind of good ventilation you get with freestanding buildings, where the air really goes through.

[Tape VI, Side One]

SMITH: [What were you doing in Thailand?]

SEKLER: Thailand was another UNESCO mission. Once they knew you and you completed several missions to their satisfaction, they would send you to other places too. In Thailand it was Sukothai. In Sukothai you have the remnants of a medieval capital, and the remnants are for the main part what remains of ancient monasteries, the so-called wats, and it looks like this. [shows photos] The wooden sections are gone, but the columns are still there and the stupas are there, all those chedis, as they call them. There are a great many of those, and today they sit either in the jungle or in a kind of savannah vegetation. It was quite beautiful because often with a wat there was a pond with water lilies on it. This is a detail from the main wat, Mahathat. You see, it's always the same elements: the columns, and the chedi.

The Thai government, in a really very praiseworthy effort, declared the whole area a historical park, made a master plan for it, and then wanted

UNESCO to review the plan to see if it made sense, or if there were any improvements needed. So I was sent out there to look at the master plan and the site, and then I was sent out a second time to assist in the preparation of an inventory of all the monuments. To stand on one of the small hills and look out over the jungle and then see here and there the tops of the chedis of these sanctuaries sticking out is quite a touching sight.

SMITH: Your reports seem to indicate that you spent a fair amount of time preparing budgets.

SEKLER: Checking budgets, really. They prepare them and I have to check them; I remember in this case it was with the aid of a Thai expert, who also happened to be a former student. By that time he had a very leading position in the Thai building industry. So I asked him to look the figures over so I could be sure that they were not fancy figures. That part was quite simple. But I had to know what was really needed—what archaeological equipment and what conservation equipment was needed.

There were interesting problems there because many of these buildings were stone; others were just brick, stuccoed over where much of the stucco had been lost, and then often these stupas had a sand filling. There are step pyramids on one of the sides, which I photographed on my first visit. The trouble is that robbers come and dig—they are looking for votive objects—and on my second

visit the same monument looked like this. [shows photos] The stupas are very vulnerable once the mantle is disturbed. The robbers of course dig into it to see if there is something down there, then they leave it and the monsoon comes, and that's the result. I wanted to draw attention to this fact so that the Thai authorities would do something about it.

SMITH: It looks half-destroyed.

SEKLER: It was half-destroyed.

SMITH: Can that be restored?

SEKLER: At that point it could still have been restored because the stones of the mantle were still lying there as they had fallen down. I don't know what they did, I haven't been back since the second mission.

SMITH: Was this done as part of your architectural practice?

SEKLER: Yes, as a private consultant, not for the university at all.

SMITH: Did you have an office where you had staff to work with you on these consulting projects?

SEKLER: For the consulting projects I had only a temporary staff, usually graduate students. As long as it was a question of real building I had to have people, not a big office. Or as I said, I worked with this colleague of mine, Prehsler, who runs an office continuously.

SMITH: This is in Vienna?

SEKLER: In Vienna, yes.

SMITH: Did you get an architectural license in Massachusetts?

SEKLER: No.

SMITH: So you don't normally practice in the U.S.?

SEKLER: No, I am registered in Austria.

SMITH: Have you designed anything in the U.S. aside from the Austrian Cultural House?

SEKLER: Only exhibitions, for which I don't need a license.

SMITH: What were the problems you faced with the Wittgenstein house and the [Otto] Wagner Postsparkasse?

SEKLER: I mentioned yesterday that they wanted to pull the Wittgenstein house down. It was a question of convincing the authorities that it was worthy to be kept, that it was indeed a historic monument.

SMITH: Beyond the fact that Wittgenstein had designed it and lived there?

SEKLER: Yes. As for the Postsparkasse, somebody had started restoring it and he was violently attacked by a group of architects. They felt that he was botching up everything and it was all wrong. The minister responsible for the restoration wanted to know the truth, so she commissioned three experts to write opinions, and I was one of them. I arrived at the conclusion that it wasn't true: that these conservation and restoration efforts were in fact very well thought out,

well done, and except for minor changes there was no need to make such a big fuss against it. I suspect that the big fuss was partly the envy of people who would have liked to get that commission. So that worked out all right. The work was approved, the little changes I had suggested were made, and the building stands and flourishes and functions.

SMITH: Historical preservation does pose problems for contemporary architects because more and more buildings get classified as monuments. Many more, it seems to me, than in previous times.

SEKLER: Yes, so you really have to fight for a reasonable balance. You can't stifle modern creativity. Also, there are certain areas where an architect doesn't have to go on an ego trip and just show the world all the things he or she can do, where modesty and reticence is indicated.

SMITH: You were on the board of directors for Architectural Heritage Incorporated. Was that a local group?

SEKLER: That was here, yes. It still exists. They are people who rehabilitate buildings. They did the old city hall here, for example. Fundamentally, they rehabilitate the buildings, sell them, and then take on the next one. In Vienna, for two or three years now, I have been on a board that is called Denkmalbeirat, which is an advisory board to the historic monuments office. Difficult and tricky cases are referred to this board. For example, there's a famous building by Josef

Hoffmann, the Sanatorium Pukersdorf, which has languished because it was owned by people who couldn't afford to maintain it, and its condition was getting worse and worse. It was finally bought by a developer with a lot of land around it. Now the question was how this land around it would be developed without visually destroying the historic building. Even if the owner promised, as he did, to refurbish the sanatorium, if he built buildings that were too high or too garish around it, it would destroy it, in a sense. So his designs or the designs of his architect were referred to a committee of the Denkmalbeirat, of which I was of course a member because of my Hoffmann book.

We spent a good deal of time looking at those plans, suggesting revisions, looking at the revised plans, suggesting further revisions, until finally a scheme was arrived at where we felt that the modern buildings would be compatible with the old. They may not have been inspired, but at least they were not disturbing. So the Denkmalbeirat decides cases like this. Can this building be pulled down or not? One side says yes, and the other says no, and each brings evidence and witnesses. Then it ends with us, and we have a hard time deciding.

SMITH: I did want to ask you about Hoffmann, since you spent a quarter of a century working on him. I think I noted that your first interview or your first correspondence in the endnotes was from 1959.

SEKLER: Easily, yes.

SMITH: And there was quite a bit of research throughout the 1960s, although you didn't publish the book until 1982.

SEKLER: I collected the material and always found there were some big gaps. One thing led to another, and what it often meant was ferreting out old ladies or gentlemen who still remembered something and then going to local archives outside Vienna looking for plans, and a lot of Viennese cultural history came to life. I mean, the Wittgenstein family was one of the main clients of Josef Hoffmann, among others. [Richard] Beer-Hofmann, the poet, was one of his clients. As I said, I had known Hoffmann personally in the early fifties, and then I had to work with his widow as long as she was alive, which was for quite a long time. She had a lot of papers she wouldn't let out, or she only let them out in little pieces, because she liked company. [laughter] So it was a long and painful process.

SMITH: What was the genesis of the particular interest that you had in Hoffmann?

SEKLER: It was like with Wren. I have this perhaps misplaced sense of wanting to establish historic justice. I get annoyed if I think there is something people refuse to realize. For me the great experience was to see the Palais Stoclet in Brussels. It all came about like this: I was asked in England, when Hoffmann died, to write an obituary, and I realized I knew nothing about

Hoffmann really, except anecdotes, and that he had built the Palais Stoclet. So I said, "Yes, I'll do it, but I'll need some time," not realizing that I was talking about twenty-five years. I never wrote that obituary. [laughter] I wrote to the people in Brussels, and at that time the son of the original owner of the Palais Stoclet was still alive. He was very friendly and very cooperative. I was really treated royally, welcomed, given tea and shown the whole place. It was so beautiful, I was absolutely overwhelmed. It was enormous, and every detail was designed with a richness of imagination. I had never seen anything like it. So I wanted to put it on the map. I wrote a piece about the Stoclet for my old teacher, Wittkower; it's in his festschrift. It later became part of the book, in a changed version.

While I was doing research for that piece, Herbert Thurner, a former assistant of Hoffmann's, who was a friend of mine, said he would introduce me to Hoffmann's widow. I soon realized that I had touched only the tip of an iceberg. Hoffmann had done vast amounts of work that had been completely forgotten. Some of it appeared in obscure publications, but in Vienna at that time people did not know about it. There were a few old people from Hoffmann's generation who knew Hoffmann was an important architect, but outside Vienna, nothing. Here in this country people knew very little about Loos or Klimt, and of course nothing about Hoffmann. I remember when I wanted to lecture about

Klimt there was one slide in the Fogg Art Museum collection. It's hard to believe that that was so, but you can believe me. Then Hoffmann's widow let the material out slowly, and I found other stuff. I still didn't want to write a big book. I wanted to write something about his early years, because they were the interesting ones. But his widow used all her wiles and wept and said, "Look, this is so sad. Nobody remembers my husband." She sort of twisted my arm to do more, to maybe do a monograph, because the man who had planned a monograph had died. I went through his estate, which was deposited in a museum. It was good material but it was just notes; there was no text. He hadn't even started. So one thing led to another, and of course I was interrupted by teaching, going to Kathmandu, and so on. I wasn't writing during all of those twenty-five years, but I was collecting material.

SMITH: Had you always intended to do a catalogue raisonné?

SEKLER: No, but then I realized if I wanted to do a good job on the text, I needed a catalogue raisonné; I had to know what the man did. So, in one sabbatical year I finally wrote it. It was a big effort, but I pushed it out. The actual writing wasn't more than a year, but the research was twenty-four years.

SMITH: One of the interesting things about the subject choice, particularly the fact that you started working on it in the fifties, was that Hoffmann was outside what Meyer Schapiro would call the "main line."

SEKLER: Absolutely, yes.

SMITH: I said it didn't surprise me that the Fogg would only have one slide of Klimt because here in the U.S., certain museums and many art historians focused heavily on the main line—from one master to the next.

SEKLER: That's right, yes.

SMITH: The culs de sac, so to speak, might be interesting, but were not really considered worthy of close attention.

SEKLER: Also, I was annoyed, just as I was annoyed in the case of Wren, with the provinciality of historians. I was annoyed by the fact that there was practically no mention of Hoffmann in *Space, Time and Architecture*. Do you realize that? Pevsner at least mentioned the Sanatorium Purkersdorf. But in the official historiography of the modern movement, Hoffmann was not in there. I thought this was an injustice. The man deserved to be mentioned. He had done a great deal of work and some of it was pioneering work of very fine quality. So that was a real motivation for me, to want to straighten out the record, which I have done.

What was lucky for me was something I did not want, but it happened. The book came out just as postmodernism began to flourish. I was rather dismayed that a lot of postmodernists jumped on the Hoffmann bandwagon, and there were Hoffmann chairs imitated and used by a number of them, and the

Hoffmann recessing of framing elements was used over and over again, and the squares. That wasn't my intention at all, but it certainly sold a lot of books, and probably influenced the fact that it was translated into so many languages. So sometimes, you know, it isn't all planned.

SMITH: But in that sense you contributed to the demise of modernist orthodoxy.

SEKLER: Yes, but that was okay. After all, from a historian's point of view it was correct. It set the record straight.

SMITH: Right. Not to make a polemical argument but to set the record straight. So in your point of view that would be the distinction between the historian and the critic, or the activist?

SEKLER: I think that's a good way of putting it, yes. You know you will never find out how it really was, but you can come close or less close to it, and you can present it, or you can polemically present it; that's the difference.

SMITH: But you did have an argument in the book, did you not?

SEKLER: But the argument was to show what had been created and where it fitted in, and what influence it exerted.

SMITH: I guess then the question is, if you don't have a polemical argument structuring historical work, what are the lessons for both students and the general public that are to be found in architectural history?

SEKLER: Do you always need polemics to get a lesson out of something? I feel

people should be encouraged to try to arrive at as truthful as possible a judgment of affairs, avoiding the polemics. As Corbu once said, "The truth is a river that flows in the middle."

SMITH: Of course he was not above polemics himself.

SEKLER: Not at all, no. In a sense there are polemics in my book. For example, I point out that French art deco owes a great deal to Josef Hoffmann, and the French absolutely refuse to acknowledge this. It can be proved that Paul Poiret was in Vienna visiting Hoffmann, buying things at the Wiener Werkstätte, and he was full of praise for it. If you look at the designs in the famous Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, in 1925, some of it comes straight from Hoffmann. Hoffmann had done the same thing twelve years earlier, and there were a few contemporaries who noticed it, but in France it is not mentioned.

Or there is [Robert] Mallet-Stevens, the Belgian architect, who has been rediscovered. He had admired the Stoclet when he was young. He went to work in Hoffmann's office in Vienna, and it is very clear that this was the jumping off point for his own work. But in the monographs on Mallet-Stevens that the Belgians write, this is just not mentioned, or it's in a footnote. So that's what I mean about setting the record straight. Sure, there are some polemics in there. There was also the question of setting the record straight about the relationship between Hoffmann and Loos, which also has been much distorted in an anecdotal

fashion.

SMITH: But Loos is an icon, strangely enough. I mean, he is an icon for the postmodernists.

SEKLER: Yes, for many, but the real historic treatment of Loos hasn't been written, and I don't want to write it. I had enough with Hoffmann. But I know a lot about Loos, and I hope someday somebody will do the work on that and the picture will be somewhat different from what it is now. Now Loos is very much a myth.

SMITH: In the twenty-five years between the Wren book and the Hoffmann book, much changed in terms of the sociology of art and architecture. The number of college students doubled or tripled in both Europe and America, the number of people going to museums has quadrupled. So on a superficial level, the numbers of people who are interested in the arts has increased geometrically. Has that affected the readership of these books? Does that affect in any way how art and architecture are discussed?

SEKLER: There is a continual output of new periodicals about the arts in different countries, glossy, splendid things. I really don't know. I haven't noticed that it has led to a more profound or deeper serious relationship to the arts. I don't know of any revelatory publications that have come out about the arts in recent years—nothing that has shaken me up terribly or given me new

ideas about the arts. Obviously, as long as I was linked intimately with the Carpenter Center I wanted to know what was going on. But much of what I read I didn't find particularly revealing.

SMITH: As a person attached to the modern movement, did you believe in the concept of progress? Was that something that was meaningful to you?

SEKLER: Let me qualify it. I believe in some progress, for example in the medical sciences, in public health, in various selected areas to do with technology, with food production. I don't believe in the overriding concept of progress, the ideological notion of linear progress. In my twentieth-century course I used this wonderful quote from [Johann] Nestroy that Wittgenstein put at the head of the early edition of his *Philosophical Investigations*. It says, "Überhaupt hat der Fortschritt das an sich, dass er viel grösser ausschaut, als er wirklich ist." But I'm not a pessimist in the sense of denying there has been any progress. There has been progress and there is progress, and we don't die from cholera on the whole anymore, and people are not, you know, on the whole living like they did in the mid-nineteenth century in the suburbs of Vienna or Paris.

SMITH: Except perhaps in Mexico City.

SEKLER: Yes. But one can hope that there it will also be improved.

SMITH: I had asked you about logical positivism before, but I wanted to ask

you about Karl Popper.

SEKLER: I am a great admirer of Popper's, yes. I read most of his things, beginning with *Logik der Forschung* in German, which must have been quite a long time ago.

SMITH: So it was before you came to the U.S.?

SEKLER: I think so, but it's hard to know. You know, it may have been after England, but I know that I first read it in German. I think I got it out of the library of the Technische Hochschule. I remember it as a very much handled volume.

SMITH: So the idea of a community of inquiry engaged with reality is very important to you?

SEKLER: Yes. I also read *The Open Society and its Enemies*, and he made a lot of sense to me. On the whole, he still makes a lot of sense to me.

SMITH: In a sense, the names are linked in terms of the polemics, but a key figure in the humanities since the 1960s has been Thomas Kuhn.

SEKLER: I have a good deal of admiration for Kuhn, actually.

SMITH: Not to overgeneralize, but the narrative turn that swept through the humanities, including art history, can be traced to the way in which people embraced Kuhn not very critically, and perhaps not really understanding what he was writing about.

SEKLER: Yes, because his writings are not easy to read. I think that's a good comment, I agree.

SMITH: Can we speak of rules of historical method that you follow? There's something implicit in what we've been talking about today, but I wonder if you have a more articulated set of rules?

SEKLER: I don't have a sheet where I check whether I have always followed the rules, but one rule certainly is Don't jump to conclusions before you have all the facts. If you cannot lay your hands on that publication that might still have an important clue, you have to get it; you really have to. All the rest follows from this first what in historic preservation would be called inventorizing, and that has to be as thorough and as complete as you can make it. A lot of the nonsense that exists in the world follows from not following this simple rule. People get a few facts and jump to conclusions. Many of the great hypotheses are based on that. So that would probably be the first rule.

The second rule—again this is banal, everybody knows it—is to try and get the context. Don't see your subject as an isolated case that you follow now, because it is embedded in a bigger picture, and the more you can get of that the more the individual case will make sense, fall into place, and become explicable. I'm quite old-fashioned, in a sense. I still follow that adage, "Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur quomodo, quando."—Answer these questions, and then you

have already a great deal. My personal bias is to try and look at something as far as is possible from the point of view of the maker, so I am quite against the current fashion, where only the interpreter of the text matters, not the author. To me the author matters a great deal.

In the Hoffmann book I tried to see what happened in a given moment, how it would have been through the eyes of somebody who was an architect aged thirty years at that moment working in Vienna. What would have motivated him? I am glad to say that was the one thing which [Carl] Schorske picked up in his review of the book. It was included in a review of literature dealing with that age, and I think it was in the *New York Times*. Schorske said I was trying to look at it from the inside; he got it immediately. That to me is what interests me most, because, after all, I'm teaching future architects. If I can tell them how so-and-so did it, or what moved him, or what were the conditions that thwarted him, that will be very helpful to them.

So that is my bias, and I am obviously formed by the methods I was trained in. If you have been through Frankl, and of course Wölfflin, and Wittkower for that matter, you work with spatial analysis and refined stylistic analysis. You really examine what things look like, compare them, and see what changes there are. The Warburg shot in the total mixture is of course the search for the meaning, which is at the core of the questions. Why was this created?

Was the aim spiritual? What's the iconography? These questions would be typical for somebody of my generation.

Structuralism came later, and deconstruction came even later. So while I read these things with great interest, and I'm trying to understand them, I don't feel moved to apply them. Also, I'm very critical of much of it. I can't take somebody like Baudrillard really seriously, somebody who invents a quote and puts it as a motto at the top of one of his articles ("Simulacra and Simulations"), stating that it's a quote from the Book of Wisdom. As a historian I take a quote as a motto very seriously, so I looked at the Book of Wisdom, and I got a friend in biblical studies who has a concordance, and she assured me that this quote did not occur anywhere in the Book of Wisdom. It sounded suspicious to me; It didn't sound like the Book of Wisdom, so where is the wisdom of Mr. Baudrillard? That for me makes what follows a little suspect.

I don't buy the message that nothing matters, that it's all a narrative and you can do what you want with it. That's to me absolute nihilism that doesn't lead anywhere; it's not going to lead to new insights.

SMITH: We have not talked about your general tastes in terms of art, music, literature, or film for that matter. I don't want to spend a lot of time on it, but I just wonder if you could sketch in what you favor.

SEKLER: Again, I think it fits with what we said about being from the

generation that sort of grew up with the modern movement. Of course the first painter I learned to love was Cézanne. I've always had a lot of commerce with artists—they're my best friends. When I was a young man, an artist friend of mine introduced me to the work of Cézanne. He was painting watercolors in a Cézanne-esque fashion.

SMITH: He was Viennese?

SEKLER: Yes. At a fairly young age, in Vienna, I was hit by Klimt. I am by now one of the few people who saw his famous big faculty paintings that were destroyed in the war. I saw them in an exhibition in the Secession, before they were removed for safekeeping where they then perished. I remember I was quite overwhelmed. I have admired Klimt ever since, especially as a draftsman.

When I was a child, my father took me to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. I loved what followed Cézanne. I still love the impressionists. I am quite orthodox in my tastes, in a sense. The good Picassos, Juan Gris—and actually rather later I began to really love the Italian colorists, especially Titian. We have some good ones in Vienna, really wonderful paintings. Most recently I have been overwhelmed by revisiting Velázquez in the Prado—*Las Meninas* and a few other paintings. I went afterwards to the museum of modern art and walked through those collections and found a lot of what I saw weak when compared with Velázquez.

[Tape VI, Side Two]

SEKLER: I'll certainly go a long way for a good Manet; it just gives me a great joy.

SMITH: What about literature and music, or film?

SEKLER: Of course you grow up with a certain literature. I grew up of course with German-language literature, so for me still, some Rilke poems when I hear them, move me deeply, also some Hölderlin. I don't think you can get quite so moved by anything in a foreign language; it's very deep, the music of the language. Then in England at that time I heard T. S. Eliot read his own poetry. I can still hear his voice reading "The Waste Land" and "Ash Wednesday." I can hear it in my ear, that voice without hope—"I do not hope to turn again . . ."

That stays with me. I read a lot of the great plays; they were around the house because of my father. I spent a lot of time in the theater, not necessarily his theater, but also the Burgtheater, in Vienna. I read the great plays, the classics.

SMITH: Schiller?

SEKLER: Schiller's *Don Carlos*, Goethe's *Faust*, and *Egmont*, Shakespeare, naturally. Who isn't moved by Shakespeare? I was lucky, I saw an unforgettable performance at the Madder Market Theater in Norwich, England. This was run by a real character named Nugent Monck, an Irish theater fanatic, who had built a Shakespearean theater there, or adapted some existing structure.

He performed Shakespearean plays there without intermissions because he maintained this had been the case in the original. I was there for *Othello*. It was almost too much; it became so powerful and so built up that I almost couldn't take it. I almost had to leave. This reminds me of another Shakespearean memory and that is Olivier in the movie versions of *Henry IV* and *Hamlet*. I can still see these scenes. Some of the great Italian films: *Roma, città aperta*, and others; I can't remember the titles. Also some historic works like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. I don't know if you've ever seen that?

SMITH: Yes.

SEKLER: And on the frightening, horrible side, but extremely powerful as movies, [Leni] Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens*, and *Olympiade*; I saw these films here in the U.S. We have a film archive in the Carpenter Center. I had to say, "God, this is so masterfully done, and at the same time it's so horrible, so uncanny and gruesome." Also French films—that wonderful *Les Enfants du Paradis*, for example, and Jean Cocteau's *Orphée*. Those are just a few that come to my mind. I must admit that more recently I haven't been to the movies very often. I get so involved with my work here.

SMITH: It just gives a picture of the cultural milieu and your tastes.

SEKLER: I have honestly tried very hard to follow what happens in painting and I must say I have been very impressed by some of Anselm Kiefer's recent work.

SMITH: Did you like Joseph Beuys?

SEKLER: I don't like his work but I admire it. I was very impressed. I think he's a great artist, or was a great artist, but it was too depressing. I think I'm fundamentally an optimist. I have also tried to follow music. In Vienna, friends tried to introduce me to twelve-tone music and I went to performances, but I am not personally very musical, unfortunately. I find it hard to follow. I would say it roughly ends for me with Mahler—that I love. I always hope that I may yet graduate and go beyond that.

SMITH: You were not taken with Schoenberg?

SEKLER: The early Schoenberg, yes. What is it . . . it's a very poetic piece which I heard not so long ago. Enchanted night or something like that, isn't it?

SMITH: Yes, *Verklärte Nacht*.

SEKLER: *Verklärte Nacht*, yes. I loved that; that is really great. I was turned off Schoenberg because of his awful paintings. How anyone could show these things; it's such bad art. He should have stuck with his music. He shouldn't have thought that he was the universal genius who could paint too. If you really care for painting, if you look at them as interesting psychological phenomena, that's another story.

I can be very happy with some Schubert; he can move me to tears. I can feel perfectly at peace, like most people, with some Mozart. I will forever

remember the occasion when my mother came to my room in Vienna to visit. She was already past ninety and pretty ill, just degenerating through old age. At that moment on the radio someone was playing a very ethereal piece by Mozart. Somewhere I wrote down what it was. It was pure harmony, and for that moment this old woman looked happy once more.

SMITH: I have one more question and then I will let you go, though it may take more than a couple of minutes. Your wife [Mary Patricia May Sekler] is an art historian.

SEKLER: Yes.

SMITH: I wondered, to what degree is your relationship a collaborative one?

SEKLER: I try to stay out of her work, but I'm happy if she asks my advice. She was my student at one stage of the game.

SMITH: A graduate student?

SEKLER: Yes. Her Ph.D. is from Harvard.

SMITH: In fine arts?

SEKLER: Yes. She took some of her courses and seminars over here. There was the famous time when she went to the chairman of the department to ask whether she would be allowed also to take a studio course in the department of Architectural Sciences, and he rose in his chair and said, "My heavens no; that is manual!" [laughter]

I guess I must have influenced her in the sense that I suggested she should do her dissertation about Le Corbusier, about his paintings or the interaction of his paintings with his architecture. She ended up doing this impressive catalogue raisonné of Le Corbusier's early drawings. She is still enamored with Le Corbusier, still researching and finding out more things about him, but she doesn't find much time for her research. So I ask her if I have a question about Corbu. By now I'd say she knows more about Corbu than I do—what is published and where it is. She's a big reference source for this subject. But I don't interfere at all with her research, and what she wants to do, she should do. But of course she shows an interest in my projects. Mercifully, she reads my English texts. She not only proofreads them but she improves the English. I've learned a lot of English from her. Sometimes we argue terribly about that.

SMITH: Did you have a hard time learning to write in English?

SEKLER: Well, it began in London of course when I submitted my English version of the Wren text for correction to friends, and they were quite merciless, and I learned a good deal in that way.

SMITH: Did you write that book in German first?

SEKLER: No. I wrote it in English right away. They advised me it would be foolish to do it any other way, and it was there that I got rid of the worst Germanicisms—style, the involved sentences, and so on. I later made a German

version which I wanted to use in Vienna, but I never did. My wife has corrected many things I have written, and I have been grateful for it.

SMITH: Do you share perspectives on art history and its development?

SEKLER: Not too much, no, because she has gotten involved in many other wonderful things. She is taking care of planting a children's playground that's near our house. When she began, it was a real dump. There were a few concrete animals there, but it was dirty, really in miserable condition. She had just been in France doing research at the Fondation Le Corbusier, and she noticed a lovely children's playground right behind Notre Dame. It was neat and well kept and there were flowers and everything. So, ten years ago, she started cleaning up this public playground. She started planting a few flowers, and it was the beginning of a project which has now made this playground into a public attraction at springtime. People come from quite a distance to see this little paradise. Then she has a bubble day for toddlers around the time of Mother's Day, in May. The children are allowed to do all sorts of things in the playground—blow bubbles and play games. It's quite touching. It has inspired people—this is remarkable—along Mount Auburn Street, where this playground is, to plant flowers out in front of their houses. So the whole environment there has been cheered up a little, and now the local metropolitan park commission has put up a plaque that says this lot has been adopted by Pat Sekler and friends,

because she has friends who help her. It's quite a job, all this planting and watering and weeding, and last year she got a citation from the commissioner. But all this gardening takes time. As I told her at the beginning, "Look, don't complain to me if you don't have time enough for your research!" It's not a bad thing she is doing; it's a lovely thing. She is making many people happy.

SMITH: I have exhausted my questions, so I wonder if there's anything that you want to add before we close, something I should have asked you that I didn't?

SEKLER: One thing that I should mention is that I do value friendship highly. I have a few good friends, and that is to me a great encouragement. I am in this respect a social animal. It is not a big circle of friends, just a few people, some of whom I have known now for half a century. If you've known somebody for half a century who has always behaved decently and you have always found reliable; this is a wonderful feeling. With these people I am very happy when we are together. That I think is an important role in my life and often I feel that a lot one does is really just for those few people you care about. So that's something I might add. I also think that to be in certain places in Vienna, urban spaces, or monuments, or configurations still makes me very happy. I feel very much at home there.

SMITH: Vienna remains your *paese*, as they would say in Italian.

SEKLER: I guess it's the story of the primal landscape that you carry with you

for the rest of your life. It doesn't mean that I don't also very much appreciate the number of places here that make me happy, but they don't affect me quite as profoundly. When I was awarded the Prechtel medal, the highest honor my old alma mater, the Technical University of Vienna, awards, the ceremony took place in the "Prechtelsaal," the same place in which as a young assistant I had listened to Josef Hoffmann speaking. It is a neoclassical, tall ceremonial hall in the historic main building which dates from the time when Johann Joseph Ritter von Prechtel had founded the school. There was music by a string quartet, the academic senate with its members in their regalia, and a laudatio. And there, in 1994, I saw in the audience friends who had been in school with me in 1934, and I must say, I was deeply moved.

SMITH: Do you think that you will continue to commute back and forth?

SEKLER: As long as destiny metes it out that I am healthy enough, that it doesn't become a burden for me and for the others. I probably will think of things long after you have left.

SMITH: I'm sure, yes.

SEKLER: But yes . . . the friends, and also, I should say, the artists.

SMITH: You've mentioned that. You have artist friends in Vienna?

SEKLER: Absolutely, yes. And also here, from when I was at the Carpenter Center, and I am still in touch with them. It's just something special, the way

they react and live and respond to you, as opposed to many other people. I feel very comfortable with them.

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